

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Preaching and Teaching

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in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Word Not in Words: The
First Lutheran Martyrs

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on Revelation 21:1–4

"Created for LIFE!": LYA 2023 Sunday Sermon

Book Review

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The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 63, No. 4 (December 2023)

IN CONNECTION TO PREACHING, WALTHER IN HIS *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology* quoted the Apology, “There is nothing that keeps people at church more than good preaching.”¹ The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) in its strategic plan recognized the vital importance of good preaching for the health of the church body. As a result, a statement defining excellence in preaching was developed and approved by the Circuit Visitors of the ELS. It is published in this volume to increase its circulation and comply with the request of the 2023 synod convention.

The second article of this issue, by Dr. Michael Smith, presents a brief overview of the history of the Lord’s Supper debate in the ELS. Smith covers how the debate began, what took place during the debate, and how the debate ended.

The evidence is all around us. Life is difficult. Life is full of hardships. Life often makes you cry. What is a Christian to do? Pastor Michael Lilienthal delves deep into Jeremiah’s lament as recorded in Jeremiah 20 and discusses the proper understanding of Jeremiah’s struggle so that we can know how to respond when “life happens.”

Hendrick Vos and Johann van den Esschen were the first Lutheran martyrs and this year is the 500th anniversary of their martyrdom. Pastor Jacob Kempfert explains the events leading up to their executions.

¹ C.F.W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 95.

This issue also includes two sermons and a book review. The first sermon is from this year's synod convention and the second is from this year Lutheran Youth Association convention. The book review, by Gaylin Schmeling, is on Asaph Ben-Tov's *Johann Ernst Gerhard (1621–1668): The Life and Work of a Seventeenth-Century Orientalist*.

—TAH

Definition of Excellence in Preaching and Teaching

LSQ Vol. 63, No. 4 (December 2023)

Editor's Note: The Circuit Visitors of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod worked on developing a definition of excellence in preaching and teaching, assigned by the ELS five-year strategic plan: "Tell of Jesus and His Love." The final document was included in the President's Report to the 2023 convention. The synod requested, "That the document be given wider dissemination by being published in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*."

SINCE THE PREACHING AND TEACHING OF THE Word of God saves the souls of those who hear by leading them to Christ, the faithful pastor strives for excellence in his preaching and teaching. Preaching and teaching are not identical. By nature, preaching is declaratory; teaching can be more interactive. Yet much of what makes for excellent preaching also applies to excellent teaching. In the church, excellent preaching and teaching:

- faithfully expounds the Holy Scriptures,
- properly distinguishes between the law and the gospel,
- applies the law and the gospel specifically to the lives of those who hear it,
- uses logical organization to produce a clear, coherent, unified message, and,
- employs appropriate rhetorical principles to engage hearers.

1. Excellent preaching and teaching faithfully expound the Holy Scriptures.

The pastor does not speak for himself, but in the stead of Christ (Luke 10:16). He therefore bases the sermon on a portion (text) or portions (a series of related texts) of the Holy Scriptures, studies them in their original languages, evaluates them in their immediate and broader contexts, and mines them for their major ideas and applications for the spiritual benefit of those who hear. If a particular text contains a *sedes doctrinae* (a major doctrinal proof passage) for a specific doctrine of Scripture, the preacher may highlight that doctrine in his sermon.

In the classroom the pastor also prepares to teach faithfully by studying Scripture. Even in courses not directly related to a specific portion of Scripture (e.g., a course in Reformation history or a catechetical lesson), the instructor remains faithful to Scripture and teaches all things in the light of God's truth.

2. Excellent preaching and teaching properly distinguish between the law and the gospel.

Ministers both young and old can continually grow in the art of properly distinguishing law and gospel in both the pulpit and the classroom. The law and the gospel are to be declared in every sermon (Luke 24:46–47), drawn out of the scripture on which the sermon is based. The preacher faithfully proclaims what God has commanded in the law primarily to expose and condemn sin, but also to guide God's people in their daily life. Furthermore, preachers recognize the law's limits: the law neither saves nor has the power to change hearts. God has reserved that work for the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, while the pastor proclaims both the law and the gospel, the gospel predominates. He proclaims Christ's active obedience and his passive obedience, boldly declaring the promises of Christ's resurrection: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. The pastor directs people to Christ, who justifies and sanctifies them by the Spirit in the means of grace (Mt 28:19–20).

3. Excellent preaching and teaching apply the law and the gospel specifically to the lives of those who hear it.

The pastor strives to apply the law and the gospel to each individual in a personal manner (including himself), driving each to repentance with the law, and then absolving each with the blood of Christ (Romans 3:23–26).

Faithful preaching and teaching also distinguishes between justification and sanctification, recognizing that the Spirit accomplishes both through the proclamation of God's Word. In the realm of sanctification, the preacher seeks timely applications for the lives of the people he serves while directing hearers to Christ as the One who changes hearts and lives.

Pastors also regularly direct believers' minds and hearts to the Sacraments, recalling the blessings of baptism and pointing to the promised blessings received in the Lord's Supper.

In applying the truths of law and gospel, the pastor will employ relevant illustrations, examples, and metaphors of those truths from Scripture and everyday life.

4. Excellent preaching and teaching use logical organization to produce a clear, coherent, unified message.

In sermons the pastor intends to drive home either a single, clear point or perhaps two or three related points that are relevant to the lives of God's people. To that end, he will employ an easy-to-follow structure connecting every major thought to a central theme, oriented toward accomplishing a goal. Generally, the goal of any sermon or structured lesson will be to bestow on the hearers God's blessings in Christ, so that they can return joyfully to their vocations assured of their salvation and that Christ is their Lord and companion in all aspects of life (Hebrews 13:5–6).

5. Excellent preaching and teaching employ appropriate rhetorical principles to engage hearers.

Since the sermon is a public address, preachers apply a ministerial use of *ethos* (properly representing one's self) and *pathos* (proper use of emotion) in their preaching, delivering the sermon with a sense of earnestness and urgency, yet with a loving demeanor. In this regard the preacher will not neglect matters such as eye-contact and achieving an appropriate tone, cadence, and volume in his preaching.

The Lord has blessed each pastor with differing gifts and abilities. Yet in the pursuit of excellence, no matter whether the pastor reads from his manuscript, speaks extemporaneously from an outline, or has his sermon completely memorized, he will strive to have his sermon in hand to the best of his ability.

6. Conclusion

Faithful preparation, logical organization, and proper division and application of the law and the gospel belong in both the pulpit and the classroom. In addition to deepening the students' understanding of scripture, a pastor's teaching—just as his preaching—serves to save souls through bestowing Christ and his gifts.

The aforementioned definition of excellence in preaching and teaching is an ideal, something to which faithful pastors can aspire. Yet ideals are things of which we all fall short. However, faithful pastors understand and recognize that these are the primary areas where they can hone and improve their skills as preachers and teachers. When we fall short, we bring our shortcomings and failures to the cross of Christ where our Savior absolves us with his own blood. His unceasing love moves us to continually grow in his Word and in our skills at proclaiming it. [LSQ](#)

A Brief History of the Lord's Supper Debate in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Editor's Note: This paper was presented at the 2023 Circuit 7 Conference on September 11, 2023.

PAUL WRITES IN 1 CORINTHIANS: ὁ κυριος ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτι ἣ παρεδίδοτο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον ²⁴ καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν· τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. ²⁵ ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων· τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. (1 Cor. 11:23b-25)

These words seem so straightforward even though they express one of the great mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). The Lutheran tradition has always taken these words at face value, believing—along with other things—that they clearly express the real presence of the Lord's body and blood in the Supper he gave us. If these words are so straightforward, why was there an extended debate/controversy¹ regarding the Lord's Supper that spanned *at least* twenty-two years?

I was not in the ELS when the debate began. In 1986, when I entered Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary for my final year of seminary, the debate was already well underway. Two personal

¹ It is difficult to decide whether this episode in our synod's history should be labeled as a "debate" or "controversy." The latter seems more acrimonious; the former seems more civil. Throughout this paper, in an effort not to sound inflammatory, it will be referred to as a "debate."

recollections from that year. First, my father colloquized into the ELS from the LCMS in September 1986. When I spoke with him after his successful colloquy, he remarked, “Wow! This is a great synod. The only thing they’re debating is the moment of the real presence!”² Second, during dogmatics class that year, President Petersen made passing reference to the debate in the synod about the Lord’s Supper. I leaned over to my neighboring classmate and asked, “What’s this Lord’s Supper thing all about?” He responded, “Have you read Bjarne’s book?³ It’s a good place to start.”

I didn’t read Dr. Teigen’s book right away. I probably should have. But the matter would be a source of discussion and debate at ensuing General Pastoral Conferences and synod conventions over the next number of years, so I was brought up to speed rather quickly.

The purpose of this paper is not to present a detailed account of all the minutiae of the years of debate. I will attempt to present a sketch of how the debate began, what took place during the debate, and how the debate (officially) ended. I will rely primarily on synodical records (e.g., various issues of the *Synod Report* [SR], minutes of the General Pastoral Conference, and minutes of the meetings of the Doctrine Committee), personal communications, and personal reflections. The focus of this paper will be on what happened during the debate rather than on interpretation of the events.

Background and Early Days of the Debate

Herman Sasse’s *This is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* was first published in 1959. The initial publication of his work was likely a conservative reaction to the desire for a union between the Lutherans and Reformed churches in Germany (those who were not already in the Prussian Union).⁴ In this book, Sasse emphasizes the importance of taking the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper at face value, as Lutherans had traditionally done.

² Please realize that my father had been trained in an LCA seminary where he was taught the Bible was *totally* unreliable and had served in the LCMS when Seminex days were not that far in the rearview mirror.

³ Referring to Bjarne Wollan Teigen’s *The Lord’s Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz* (Brewster: Trinity Lutheran Press, 1986).

⁴ Erling T. Teigen, personal email to author, July 22, 2023. The forthcoming “Arnoldshain Theses” would “empty out” the doctrine on the Supper.

In the 1969 SR, the report of the Doctrine Committee mentions its study of *Marburg Revisited*⁵ which prompted the members to restudy recent agreements in other countries, including the “Arnoldshain Theses” from Germany (1957).⁶ The latter were prepared by a group of Lutheran, Reformed, and Union theologians in Germany, and approved by this group in November 1957. Especially of note is Thesis Four:

The words which our Lord Jesus Christ speaks in the course of the distribution of bread and wine tell us what He Himself gives in this meal to all who approach His altar. What does He give? He, the crucified and risen Lord, allows Himself to be taken by us in His body given into death for all and in His blood shed for all. He allows Himself to be taken by us with bread and wine through His word of promise. In this way He receives us, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, into His triumphant rulership in order that we, by believing in His promise, might have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.⁷

It is also stated in the 1969 SR that the Doctrine Committee prepared and distributed a bibliography regarding the discussion of the Lord's Supper to the pastors of the synod. The committee briefly concluded about its study: “Present in all the aforesaid agreements ... is a confession of a ‘personal presence of Christ’ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, but absent in all is an unambiguous confession of the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament in the sense of Luther's Small Catechism and the other Lutheran Confessions.”⁸

Swedish pastor Dr. Tom G.A. Hardt had published his doctoral dissertation, “The Venerable and Adorable Eucharist: A Study of the Lutheran Doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the 1500s,” in 1971.⁹ Some

⁵ Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord, eds., *Marburg Revisited: A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966).

⁶ An English translation of these theses are available in Paul M. Bretscher, “The Arnoldshain Theses on the Lord's Supper,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 30; no. 2 (February 1959): 83–91.

⁷ Bretscher, “The Arnoldshain Theses,” 86. He comments: “... Thesis Four in particular leaves us in a conflicting maze of thought. It is not clear and definite. Somehow we miss Luther's definition of the Sacrament of the Altar with its ringing words, ‘It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink.’ Thesis Four places the emphasis on the gift of the Lord Himself. He condescends, as it were, to let the communicant take Him. The Lutheran Symbols do not have this emphasis” (88).

⁸ 1969 SR, 36.

⁹ An English translation of this work is now available. See Tom G.A. Hardt, *The Venerable and Adorable Eucharist: A Study of the Lutheran Doctrine of the Lord's Supper in*

say that Hardt was in agreement with Saliger's position of 1569, since Hardt stated, "John Saliger ... only set forth what all old Lutherans of the 16th century believed. ... Saliger was 'doctrinally right' in his various pronouncements on the subject."¹⁰ In his book, Hardt addressed primarily "the effectual cause of the presence, the time of the presence, and the *reliquiae*."¹¹ A wider view sees Hardt addressing the matter of the Lord's Supper from a Christological viewpoint, emphasizing that the body of Christ which is incarnated and the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper are one and the same.¹² He also expressed the belief that while external adoration of the sacrament is not required, inward adoration (faith) is: "Faith means a trust in the fact that Christ has overcome guilt in His assumed human nature, faith is the right adoration, my believing that His body and blood are present, given and shed for me."¹³ Hardt maintained that identifying the *usus* or *actio* is key: such cannot be divided into its parts of the words of institution, the distribution, and reception.¹⁴

The next reference in a SR to the Doctrine Committee's study of the Lord's Supper comes in 1975. The committee again makes reference to *Marburg Revisited* and the ostensible agreement reached between Lutheran and Reformed groups in Europe and the United States. In light of these developments, the committee assigned three papers to its members to focus on Luther's, Melancthon's, and the *Book of Concord's* doctrine of the Lord's Supper. It also assigned Pastor H.A. Theiste to study the "Leuenberg Theses" which had been recently adopted by Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe. The committee hoped to have more complete reports on the Lord's Supper for the following year.

The Leuenberg Concord, adopted in 1973, was a statement of agreement between Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe.¹⁵

the 1500s, trans. by Mark DeGarmeaux (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023).

¹⁰ Quoted in Seth Erlandsson, "The Danger of Presumptuous Questions About the Lord's Supper," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary essay file (<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1389/ErlandssonLord%27sSupper.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>), 4.

¹¹ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "The Lord's Supper in the ELS Today," unpublished paper presented at a joint ELS/WELS Madison area Winkel, 1995, 1.

¹² Personal communication with Dr. Erling Teigen, August 21, 2023.

¹³ Tom G.A. Hardt, *The Sacrament of the Altar: A Book on the Lutheran Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*. N.p., n.d. Accessed at <https://www.scribd.com/document/588168691/The-Sacrament-of-the-Altar>. This book is a condensation of Hardt's larger work, intended especially for laypeople.

¹⁴ Personal communication with Dr. Erling Teigen, August 21, 2023.

¹⁵ A translation of the draft text from 1971 is in "The Leuenberg Concord," trans. by John H. Drickamer, *The Springfielder* 35; no. 4 (March 1972): 241-9.

This concord, at best, allowed for a Reformed or Lutheran interpretation of the Lord's Supper.¹⁶ At worst, "Thesis 15 on the Lord's Supper renounces the Real Presence."¹⁷

While not reported in the SR, the Doctrine Committee continued to study the Lord's Supper between 1976 and 1978. The minutes of the Doctrine Committee in 1976 and 1977¹⁸ make reference to an ongoing study by President Aaberg on Luther's view of the Lord's Supper. In August 1977, President Aaberg presented six theses on Luther's view of the Lord's Supper, which were discussed at the December 1977 and March 1978 meetings. In January 1978, the Doctrine Committee held an informal meeting with Dr. Hardt to discuss a paper he had presented at Fort Wayne, Indiana entitled, "Contemporary Denials of the Lord's Supper." Basic agreement with his paper was expressed with the exception of how to deal with the *reliquiae*.

The Middle Years of the Debate

At its March 1979 meeting, the Doctrine Committee was informed that the WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) had requested a meeting of the two groups to discuss the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The CICR had recently adopted a paper by Prof. Siegbert Becker, "The Lord's Supper: Consecration and Moment."¹⁹ The Doctrine Committee read and discussed the paper at length, including such matters as: How do the words of consecration spoken by the pastor relate to the original utterance of the words spoken by our Lord? Which use of the words of institution effect the presence? Concerned about the

¹⁶ Eugene F. Klug, "The Concept of Church Fellowship in the Leuenberg Concord: A Critique," *The Springfielder* 36, no. 3 (December 1972): 197. See also Jobst Schöne, "The Leuenberg 'Concord,'" *Logia* 20; no. 1 (Epiphany 2011): 18.

¹⁷ "A Response to the Leuenberg Concord," produced by the Churchly Gathering for the Bible and Confession of the Faith in the Evangelical-Lutheran State Church of Hannover, trans. by John Drickamer, *The Springfielder* 36; no. 1 (June 1972): 34. The text of Thesis 15: "In the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ, the risen One, bestows himself in his body, given into death for all, and his blood through his promising word with bread and wine. He grants us thereby forgiveness of sins and liberates us to a new life out of faith. He causes us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to persons" (Drickamer, "The Leuenberg Concord," 245). Jobst Schöne also highlights paragraph 19 of the Concord which states, "To be concerned about the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in abstraction of this act is to run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the Lord's Supper" (18).

¹⁸ References to the Doctrine Committee minutes will simply be to the month and year of the meeting and not footnoted.

¹⁹ The paper is available at <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/347/BeckerLord.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

paper, the committee made tentative plans for a fall 1979 meeting with the CICR. The committee finalized plans for the joint meeting at its May 1979 meeting, approving the date of November 8–9 and planning to use Dr. B.W. Teigen's updated "The Lord's Supper and the Lutheran Confessions" as another basis of discussion.

In the 1979 SR, the Doctrine Committee reported on its continued study of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. President Aaberg had been analyzing Luther's *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* and Dr. B.W. Teigen had written two brief essays. The committee expressed its hope to produce a set of theses on the Lord's Supper but progress had been interrupted by President Aaberg's illness.²⁰

In preparation for the planned meeting between the Doctrine Committee and the WELS CICR in November 1979, the Doctrine Committee discussed two critiques of Prof. Becker's paper written by Dr. B.W. Teigen. Dr. Teigen was asked to distill these two critiques into one so it could be used for the meeting. The committee also resolved to send copies of Teigen's "The Case of the Lost Luther Reference"²¹ and "The Real Presence in the Book of Concord" to the members of the CICR for study prior to the meeting. The minutes of the December 1979²² meeting of the Doctrine Committee reported that the meeting with the CICR had taken place in November. Chairman Carl Lawrenz of the CICR stated following the meeting that he would seek agreement on four particular points²³ and emphasized that Scripture does not attempt to fix the moment of the real presence. Support grew among the Doctrine Committee members for theses on the Lord's Supper to be drawn up rather than additional papers being written. After additional discussion, the committee was generally agreed that any statement/

²⁰ Of note is that the synod resolved in 1979 that the General Pastoral Conference study the statement produced by President Wilhelm Petersen on the doctrine of the Church and report to the synod "when a consensus has been reached or when the conference reports that it is hopelessly deadlocked" (1979 SR, 63). The synod had doctrinal issues in addition to the Lord's Supper in the forefront of its collective mind.

²¹ For more on this subject, see Gaylin R. Schmeling, *Bread of Life From Heaven: The Theology of the Means of Grace, the Public Ministry, and Church Fellowship* (Mankato: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Press, 2009), 144–6.

²² Dr. Erling Teigen was a new member of the Doctrine Committee at this point. He had been appointed to replace Dr. B.W. Teigen who had resigned for health reasons.

²³ (1) That Christ is really and substantially present in the sacrament during the *usus*; (2) that the sacramental union of bread and wine and Christ's body and blood takes place during the *usus*; (3) that there is oral manducation of bread and wine in Christ's body and blood by both worthy and unworthy communicants; and (4) that the real presence is effected solely and alone by the almighty power of Christ in accordance with his words of institution, which include both his command and promise.

theses on the subject should include the following points: (1) a confession of the real presence, (2) a confession that this presence is effected by the words of institution, (3) that the presence remains throughout the *usus*, (4) that the body and blood of Christ are received by all communicants, and (5) that there is need for the entire *usus*. President Orvick was to draw up a set of theses on the Lord's Supper for discussion at its March 1980 meeting.²⁴ These theses were presented at the March 1980 meeting and adopted by the committee.²⁵

At the May 1980 meeting of the Doctrine Committee, Professor J.B. Madson and Dr. Erling Teigen presented an exegesis on the words of institution. A revised version of this exegesis was adopted at the September 1980 meeting.

The Doctrine Committee reported in the 1980 SR that it had met twice with the WELS CICR and discussed the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Discussion at the first meeting focused on a CICR document, "The Lord's Supper: Consecration and Moment," and on the Doctrine Committee's formal response to this document. At the second meeting, discussion centered on two sets of theses each entity had drawn up. The synodical presidents were to "appoint two members from each of their respective committees to continue the study of the points that have been under discussion."²⁶

In the December 1980 minutes of the Doctrine Committee, it was reported that a subcommittee of the committee and the WELS CICR, comprising President W. Petersen, Professor J.B. Madson, President C. Lawrenz, and Professor S. Becker, had met in October. The CICR subcommittee presented a three-point statement²⁷ which was discussed

²⁴ There is also a note in the December 1979 minutes that the matter of possibly declaring fellowship with the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden should be delayed until the matter of the Lord's Supper was settled in the ELS.

²⁵ The only difference between these theses and the theses adopted by the synod in 1981 (see Appendix A) is in #9. That thesis in the Doctrine Committee's March 1980 theses included a four-part repudiation: (1) of transubstantiation, (2) of "Zwilingian interpretations of the words of institution" which change "is" to "represents," (3) of receptionism, and (4) of using unconsecrated elements or consecrated elements "outside of their appointed use."

²⁶ 1980 SR, 72.

²⁷ The CICR subcommittee statement: (1) Christ is concerned that as a seal of my faith in the forgiveness of sins I receive his assurance that in Holy Communion, i.e., in the prescribed *usus*, I really receive his very body and blood, which was given for the remission of my sins. (2) Christ shows no concern in assuring me at just what moment in the Lord's Supper, i.e., in the prescribed *usus*, his body and blood begin to be present, and hence does not give me a basis for asserting any conviction in this matter. (3) Concentrating on trying nevertheless to establish a conviction concerning the moment

by the committee. One member of the committee expressed concerns that such a statement allowed for two forms of doctrine. At this December meeting a request from Dr. Tom Hardt and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sweden for opening “formal conversations regarding church fellowship” was read. It was resolved that until more was decided regarding the Lord’s Supper, including the discussion with the WELS, formal negotiations were not in order. It was also decided that the exegesis of the words of institution (adopted in September) would be sent to all pastors for study prior to the General Pastoral Conference. The committee planned to bring the adopted theses on the Lord’s Supper to the conference for distribution.

The January 1981 edition of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* included a critique by Professor Armin Schuetze of Dr. B.W. Teigen’s *I Believe: A Study of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession*. The review was generally positive but included reference to an “unfortunate” statement made by Teigen:

He writes in regard to the real presence in the sacrament: “Article X makes it evident that the Body and Blood of Christ are present before the actual distribution.” The statements from the A. C. and the Apology which are quoted are not concerned with the time but simply with the fact of the real presence.²⁸

In the 1981 SR, the Doctrine Committee reported that it had continued its study of the Lord’s Supper and it presented nine theses resulting from the meetings of the subcommittees of the committee and the WELS CICR.²⁹ A resolution was passed by the synod acknowledging agreement between the two sets of theses and the unity between the ELS and WELS on this matter.³⁰ Based on the Doctrine Committee’s recommendation, the synod also declared fellowship with the Lutheran Confessional Church of Sweden.³¹

of the beginning of the real presence only deflects the communicants’ attention from the real purpose for which Christ assures me of the presence of his body and his blood in Holy Communion.

²⁸ Armin W. Schuetze, “Review of *I Believe: A Study of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession*,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (January 1981): 72.

²⁹ See Appendix A for the full text of the theses of the ELS Doctrine Committee and the WELS CICR.

³⁰ 1981 SR, 79.

³¹ 1981 SR, 79–80.

At its September 1981 meeting, the Doctrine Committee met with Dr. B.W. Teigen who expressed his disagreement with Thesis Nine of the Lord's Supper theses. His primary contention was that because Thesis Nine did not include the word "consecrated," a denial of the efficacy of the consecration was possible. The committee did not agree with Dr. Teigen and would resolve at its December 1981 meeting to send a letter to him.³² The committee was looking forward to an upcoming paper on the Lord's Supper at the General Pastoral Conference by Pastor Harold Vetter.

At the 1982 General Pastoral Conference, Pastor Vetter presented his paper pertaining to the Lord's Supper in Article VII of the Formula. In speaking about the "moment" of the real presence, Vetter said,

Everyone is agreed that [the Formula] rejects any pinpointing of an exact moment when the Sacramental Union takes place. Some have argued, though, that as soon as the Word has been spoken, it must be effective, and therefore the Presence of Jesus' body and blood must be acknowledged from that time on. ... I believe, though, that if we read the Confessions carefully, we shall see that the Formula does not specify an exact time at which the Real Presence begins. ... What our Confessions consider important, and show it by emphasizing it over and over, is the fact that the bread and wine which are consecrated, distributed, and received are Christ's true body and blood. ... Just when the elements became his body and blood is not important (or at least not spelled out—even in a general way—in the Confessions).³³

Vetter concluded his paper:

I am not ready to call anyone a false teacher for believing that ALL of the bread and wine on the altar are Jesus' true body and blood, from the time of consecration on. Nor, certainly, do I have a quarrel with someone who treats all of these elements with reverence.

I do, though, have a quarrel with someone who makes laws about how these must be treated without fear of sinning or of

³² Dr. Teigen responded to the Doctrine Committee with a letter in March 1982. In this letter he states that the committee's theses present a "conditional consecration." The committee made tentative plans at its March 1982 meeting to restudy Thesis Nine.

³³ Harold R. Vetter, "An Analysis of the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the Lutheran Confessions with Special Emphasis on Article VII of the Formula of Concord," ELS General Pastoral Conference, September 1982, 9–10. Emphasis original.

despising Jesus' true body. Nor do I believe that it would be wise or correct to bind the consciences of our pastors and (especially) our laymen, causing them to question whether they have been celebrating the Sacrament aright, when in fact they have always believed and confessed the Truth of the Real Presence.

Our real enemies are the Romanists ... and the Sacramentarians.

...

These are our real enemies—AND NOT EACH OTHER.³⁴

In February 1983 Dr. B.W. Teigen sent a letter to the Doctrine Committee asking that the set of theses on the Lord's Supper be scrapped altogether and a new start be made. At its March 1983 meeting, the committee discussed Dr. Teigen's request but raised the possibility that he was insisting on more than what Scripture expressed. Over the next year the committee continued to discuss Dr. Teigen's concerns, some members commenting that he wanted to fix the moment of the real presence and insist that the *reliquiae* be consumed.

At its December 1985 meeting, the Doctrine Committee was presented with a paper by President Gaylin Schmeling regarding Chemnitz and the Lord's Supper.³⁵ President Petersen also suggested at this meeting that the committee might consider a revision of Thesis Nine and the possible addition of a tenth. This suggestion was to be discussed at the next meeting.

In 1986, Dr. B.W. Teigen's book, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, was published. In this work, Dr. Teigen emphasized that the words of consecration were the effective cause of the real presence on the Lord's body and blood in his Supper. He states, "Chemnitz does not hesitate to draw the inevitable conclusion that after the consecration the elements are no longer merely bread and wine, but much more. Through the words of Christ, spoken by the officiant, the sacramental union has been achieved so that the body and blood of Christ are present on the altar before the distribution and consumption."³⁶ Teigen continued, "Since there unfortunately were those going under the name of Lutherans at Chemnitz's time who did not accept the doctrine of consecration, Chemnitz wants to make the matter very clear that on the basis of Christ's own words one can and must fix the point within the

³⁴ Vetter, "An Analysis of the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," 35. Emphasis original.

³⁵ This paper was a review of Dr. B.W. Teigen's book, later published as Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Chemnitz and the Lord's Supper," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1986): 2-79.

³⁶ Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, 98.

sacramental *usus* when the presence of Christ's body and blood begins."³⁷ Pres. Schmeling maintained that the Doctrine Committee did not agree with this belief since neither Scripture nor the Confessions speak to the exact time the presence begins.³⁸ Schmeling continued:

For theological purposes the three-fold sacramental action of consecration, distribution, and reception should therefore be viewed and considered holistically as a factual and conceptual unity rather than sequentially as a series of three distinct occurrences. The consecration, distribution, and reception should be viewed as simultaneous actions rather than as consecutive actions.³⁹

Teigen also believed that Chemnitz advocated the consumption of the *reliquiae*. He quotes Chemnitz as saying, "*It conflicts with the Words of Institution when the bread which has been blessed is not distributed, not received, not eaten.*"⁴⁰ Teigen also says, "It is a dogmatic demand for Chemnitz that in accord with the will of the Savior all the elements that have been consecrated to be the body and blood of the Savior are to be distributed, received, eaten and drunk in that sacramental service."⁴¹ Schmeling, on the other hand, believes Chemnitz makes such statements in opposition to the abuses of the papistic practices of "reservation, veneration, ocular communion, and the Corpus Christi Festival."⁴²

The Doctrine Committee reported "continuing study" of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the 1986 SR, "especially the aspects of it about which there has been considerable discussion in our midst."⁴³ An article written by President Schmeling, "Chemnitz and the Lord's Supper," was recommended for publication in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*. In this article, Schmeling posits that Chemnitz emphasized the words of institution as that which effect the real presence,⁴⁴ and that he did not "pinpoint a moment" for when the presence was effected.⁴⁵

³⁷ Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, 100.

³⁸ Schmeling, "The Lord's Supper in the ELS Today," 2.

³⁹ Schmeling, "The Lord's Supper in the ELS Today," 3.

⁴⁰ Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, 131 (quoting Chemnitz' *Examen* 2, 404f. Emphasis original).

⁴¹ Teigen, *The Lord's Supper in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, 125.

⁴² Schmeling, "The Lord's Supper in the ELS Today," 4.

⁴³ 1986 SR, 57.

⁴⁴ Schmeling, "Chemnitz and the Lord's Supper," 68.

⁴⁵ Schmeling, "Chemnitz and the Lord's Supper," 73.

For Chemnitz, the entire sacramental action (consecration, distribution, and reception) had to be carried out for a genuine sacrament.⁴⁶

In the 1987 SR, the Doctrine Committee reported that it continued to discuss with the WELS CICR “the role of the words of institution in effecting the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament.”⁴⁷ Both committees were agreed that the “words of institution repeated at Christ’s command effect the real presence.”⁴⁸ The committees once again affirmed that they were in agreement with the respective theses each committee had produced in 1981.⁴⁹

At the 1987 General Pastoral Conference, President Orvick encouraged unity on the matter of the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, urging the pastors to abide by the words of FC VII:75, that “the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed, and received.”⁵⁰ He also requested that “pastors not debate this issue in the public press, such as *Christian News*.”⁵¹

The report of the Doctrine Committee noted in the 1988 SR that the 1987 General Pastoral Conference had asked it to review President B.W. Teigen’s book and present this review at the 1988 General Pastoral Conference. At the 1988 General Pastoral Conference, an entire day was spent with the presentation and discussion of a 36-page document from the Doctrine Committee, “The Theology of the Lord’s Supper.” The paper was adopted by the conference “as being in full agreement with the theses adopted by the ELS in 1981,” and the Doctrine Committee was encouraged to share the paper with the WELS CICR.⁵² The paper was also printed as the entire December 1988 issue of the *LSQ*.⁵³

However, there remained for some of the brothers misgivings about Thesis Nine. Subsequently, Dr. Erling Teigen was invited to attend the

⁴⁶ Schmeling, “Chemnitz and the Lord’s Supper,” 74.

⁴⁷ 1987 SR, 70. At a January 9, 1987 meeting of the CICR and Doctrine Committee, Professor Becker’s essay, which had been printed in the Spring 1986 *WLQ*, was discussed. The committee did not believe Becker’s essay, which was a reprint of a paper he had presented to a joint CICR-Doctrine Committee meeting, emphasized properly the power of the words of institution to effect the real presence.

⁴⁸ 1987 SR, 70.

⁴⁹ 1987 SR, 70.

⁵⁰ 1987 GPC Minutes, 2.

⁵¹ 1987 GPC Minutes, 2.

⁵² 1988 SR, 72. The secretary of the GPC at the time, Rev. Theodore Gullixson, recorded as much of the debate as possible in private minutes.

⁵³ “The Theology of the Lord’s Supper,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (December 1988): 3–83. Eventually this would become a chapter in Schmeling, *Bread of Life From Heaven*.

May 1989 meeting of the Doctrine Committee to discuss this thesis. The discussion resulted in a six-point statement to clarify Thesis Nine.

We understand Thesis Nine in the light of the following statements:

- a) The words of consecration effect the real presence of Christ's body and blood in a valid administration of the Lord's Supper (consecration, distribution and reception).
- b) Because of this consecration Christ's body and blood are present in the elements of bread and wine before the reception of the elements by the communicants.
- c) We reject any attempt to fix the mathematical point or exact moment when the real presence begins.
- d) We reject the teaching that the presence of Christ's body and blood is in any way effected by the eating and drinking of the elements by the communicants.
- e) We reject the doctrine of transubstantiation, i.e., that the earthly elements cease to exist when the real presence of Christ's body and blood begins.
- f) We reject any celebration of the Lord's Supper without communicants.⁵⁴

The synod adopted the nine theses with the six-point explanation of Thesis Nine at its 1989 convention.⁵⁵

The Doctrine Committee reported to the 1990 synod convention that a number of congregations had "formally expressed reservations" about the synod's actions in 1989 regarding the adoption of the revised theses on the Lord's Supper. The committee stated it was ready to meet with representatives of the concerned congregations. Three pastors offered a memorial to the 1990 convention contending that protests against Thesis 9b had been submitted by some congregations and pastors and that "a more substantial division" had "surfaced among our brethren concerning the matter of the consecration as presented in theses 7 and 8." They asked for the theses to be sent back to the Doctrine Committee for further study, that the committee constitute a subcommittee of its members and at least four representatives of those who had or were protesting the theses, and that this subcommittee would report

⁵⁴ 1989 SR, 73.

⁵⁵ The adoption of the revised theses was also the answer to a memorial brought by twelve pastors that the General Pastoral Conference reconsider and discuss contended issues (1989 SR, 78).

to subsequent synod conventions “until this matter has been resolved to the synod’s satisfaction.”⁵⁶ The synod answered the memorial with a reiteration from the Doctrine Committee that it was willing to meet with any concerned parties.

In the 1991 SR, the Doctrine Committee reported that the issue of the Lord’s Supper continued to be discussed within the synod and also with other entities. The committee added, “We remain confident that the Lord of the Church will lead us to a wholesome and peaceful resolution also of this matter.”⁵⁷

The Doctrine Committee reported to the 1992 convention: “The Doctrine Committee at this time has no further proposal regarding our synodically adopted statement.”⁵⁸ The synod, however, in part answering a memorial from a congregation, instructed the Doctrine Committee to restudy Thesis Nine, sections a-f.⁵⁹ At this convention, the synod also adopted the doctrinal statement, “We Believe, Teach, and Confess.” In section 5 on the means of grace, regarding the Lord’s Supper it is stated, “According to Christ’s Word and institution, His body and blood are truly present, distributed, and received in the Lord’s Supper, under the bread and wine.”⁶⁰

In 1993, the Doctrine Committee reported to the synod that it was studying the 1989 addendum to Thesis Nine and would bring its findings to a future convention. The committee adopted a revision of Thesis 9b at its December 1993 meeting and at its March 1994 meeting resolved to send this revision to all pastors prior to that summer’s convention.⁶¹

⁵⁶ 1990 SR, 73.

⁵⁷ 1991 SR, 82. The September 1990 minutes of the committee mention discussion with the WELS CICR, especially regarding their critique of the six-point explanation of Thesis Nine.

⁵⁸ 1992 SR, 74. In the February 1992 minutes of the committee hope had been expressed that a revision of Thesis 9b would be presented to the 1992 convention. Such presentation was to come following another meeting with the WELS CICR subcommittee. Apparently, this meeting did not take place. It was reported in the April/May 1992 Doctrine Committee minutes that WELS Pres. Carl Mischke had informed the committee by letter that the proposed revision to Thesis 9b was not acceptable. The committee resolved to revise Thesis 9b. However, this revision was rescinded at a special meeting of the committee in May 1992.

⁵⁹ 1992 SR, 80.

⁶⁰ 1992 SR, 77.

⁶¹ The letter was dated May 6, 1994.

Latter Years of the Debate

Fulfilling its promise made to the 1993 convention, in 1994 the Doctrine Committee brought to the synod a revised Thesis 9b. It stated:

Because of this consecration by virtue of our Lord's original institution "the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received." (AC X, p. 34; see also AC XXII 6, p. 50; Ap X 1, p. 179; Ap XXIV 80 p. 264; FC SD VII 10–11, p. 571) The Scripture and the Confessions, therefore, teach that in the Supper the body and blood of Christ are received by the communicant and also that the "minister who consecrates shows forth (tenders) the body and blood of Christ to the people" (Ap X 4, XXIV 80 p. 264; see also SC VI 1–2; p. 351; SA III VII, p. 311; AC XXII 6, p. 50), that they are "truly offered with the visible elements" (FC SD VII 10–11, p. 571; see also Ap X 1, p. 179), and that they are "really present in the Supper ... under the form of bread and wine." (AC X, p. 34)⁶²

The synod decided to defer action on this revision to the 1995 convention. A memorial was also brought by Dr. B.W. Teigen regarding the Lord's Supper⁶³ and his concerns were noted.⁶⁴ The committee resolved in December 1994 to ask for time at the upcoming General Pastoral Conference to discuss the proposed revision of Thesis 9b. Such discussion did take place at the January 1995 General Pastoral Conference.

The 1995 convention did not bring resolution to the matter of the revised Thesis 9b. The Doctrine Committee reported that in the intervening year it had received "several communiqués" regarding the matter and reviewed the issue thoroughly, also noting the lengthy discussion of the matter at the January General Pastoral Conference. It was

⁶² 1994 SR, 83. This revision had first been proposed and discussed at the September 1991 Doctrine Committee meeting. It was distributed to the pastors of the synod shortly thereafter.

⁶³ Dr. Teigen said in part, "Basically the question is: How do we know that we have here the supper that Christ instituted for us? All this involves the doctrines of the *Sola Gratia* of the Gospel, the Public Ministry of the Word, the Power of God's Word, the significance of the *Mandata Dei* for Christ's Church" (1994 SR, 165).

⁶⁴ At the 1994 through the 1996 conventions, virtually the same pastors were assigned to the floor Doctrine Committee. This author was one of them. I believe President Orvick was attempting to maintain some semblance of continuity of membership on the committee during these years of the debate.

evident there was still confusion about the phrase “before the reception” in Thesis 9b. A memorial was submitted by Dr. B.W. Teigen to the convention stating in part, “The explanation [from President Schmeling to Dr. Erling Teigen regarding the real presence] is exactly the point of saying, as we presently do in Thesis 9b, that the body and blood are present before the reception or that the body and blood are present immediately after the consecration.”⁶⁵ The synod resolved to ask the Doctrine Committee to “consider the phrase ‘without the intervention of any other cause or agency’ as a substitute for the words ‘before the reception’ in the 1989 Thesis 9b.”⁶⁶ The synod further resolved that the committee conduct an open hearing on the topic, perhaps in conjunction with the upcoming General Pastoral Conference.

At its December 1995 meeting, the Doctrine Committee resolved to invite those who were opposed to the committee’s statement to its March 1996 meeting in order to clarify the issues. At the March meeting, it met with three pastors who had concerns about the synod’s statement. The minutes of the meeting stated that nothing new was learned by the committee.

The 1996 General Pastoral Conference took up the matter of the proposed change to Thesis 9b of the Lord’s Supper theses. President Gaylin Schmeling presented a statement on behalf of the Doctrine Committee, “The Lord’s Supper and the Terminology ‘Without the Intervention of Any Other Cause or Agency,’” concluding

⁶⁵ 1995 SR, 188. Schmeling points out that this phrase carried historical baggage. “The terminology ‘before the reception’ was used in the Saliger Controversy of the 1560s before Article VII of the *Formula of Concord* was written. The *Wismar Recess* which was intended to end the Saliger Controversy, used the terminology ‘before the reception’ in a number of places.... Yet, in spite of the fact that portions of the *Wismar Recess* were taken into the *Formula*, the Fathers chose not to use this terminology in Article VII of the *Formula of Concord* because of the misunderstanding that had arisen around this usage” (“The Lord’s Supper in the ELS Today,” 6). For more on the Saliger Controversy, see Gaylin R. Schmeling, “The Saliger Controversy,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (June 1987): 31–48.

⁶⁶ 1995 SR, 111. See above p. 10 for the 1989 Thesis 9b. This particular phrase appears to have come from a memorial submitted to the convention by nineteen pastors. In the memorial, the pastors also state, “Johannes Saliger, quoting the words of Johannes Wigand, in the struggle leading up to the Formula of Concord [sic] speaks for us, when he says, ‘Of the moment, that is of the time of the consecration, or when and at which time under which syllables the body and blood of Christ are present, one certainly not frivolously ask; but as soon as the word of the Lord Christ has been spoken and sounded, the simple faith accepts such plain, clear words of Christ and believes.’” (1995 SR, 188)

that this wording should not be used in the Lord's Supper theses.⁶⁷ Rev. Thomas Rank also presented a statement, arguing that the synod should return to the 1989 version of Thesis 9b.⁶⁸

The report of the Doctrine Committee to the 1996 convention stated that the committee had done what the synod had asked in 1995: it considered the substitute wording in the 1989 Thesis 9b and held an open hearing at the 1996 General Pastoral Conference. The committee then stated,

Because both the discussion at this open hearing, as well as the committee's own protracted deliberation on the matter of the wording of this document, revealed significant support neither for the suggested substitute wording that originated from the floor of the convention, nor for a need to alter the wording proposed by the Doctrine Committee, your Doctrine Committee offers to the 1996 convention the same recommendation that it first made to the 1994 convention and repeated last year. ...

It is the steadfast and unanimous conviction of the Doctrine Committee that the above proposed revision, together with the remaining body of the statement on the Lord's Supper, confesses what is necessary to a biblical and confessional Lutheran understanding regarding the time of the real presence in the sacrament. We believe that the full statement accords in every way with the teaching of Holy Scripture on this doctrine, and that it should therefore be adopted, in order that we may continue confidently to enjoy this God-given means of grace for the undeserved blessing it bestows upon us, namely, the true body and blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, who has taken away the sins of the world and now bestows the resulting forgiveness on us in His sacred Supper.⁶⁹

The synod adopted the revised Thesis 9b as presented by the Doctrine Committee in 1994, counting this also as the answer to various memorials presented on the subject.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Note that the 1996 synod convention would again direct the Doctrine Committee to consider this wording.

⁶⁸ This statement was not included in the GPC minutes but obtained from the author. Thesis 9b in the 1989 theses stated: "Because of this consecration Christ's body and blood are present in the elements of bread and wine before the reception."

⁶⁹ 1996 SR, 79.

⁷⁰ 1996 SR, 80-1. Memorials from St. Timothy, Lombard, IL; Faith, Irvine, CA; Christ the King, Bell Gardens, CA; and the seminary faculty had been received urging

In Spring 1997, Professor Thomas Nass, writing on behalf of the WELS CICR, noted the ELS' adoption of the revised Thesis 9b and stated, "It is honest to say that the revision is not constructed exactly the way the CICR would have done it, even though it is mostly a collection of statements from the Lutheran Confessions which are incontrovertible in our midst."⁷¹ Nass goes on to mention that instead of the Confessions' word order of "present, distributed, and received," Thesis 9b mentions the body and blood "are received and also distributed and present," and hopes that there is no intended shift in emphasis.⁷² He continues:

More importantly, the CICR wonders if this revision adequately addresses the issue at hand. Does it speak specifically to the controversy so that it will resolve the problem?

However the CICR has been encouraged by our recent conversations with the ELS Doctrine Committee. The Doctrine Committee is quick to say that the ELS does not want to try to settle the moment of the real presence. They are content to let it remain an open question. Individuals may have pious opinions about the moment, but nothing should be accepted as Bible doctrine beyond the statement of the Confessions that the true body and blood are present, distributed, and received in the Lord's Supper.⁷³

Nass also mentioned that the essay "The Lord's Supper in the ELS Today" by President Schmeling, was a "fine summary on the consecration, the moment of the presence, and the *reliquiae*."⁷⁴

Two memorials were brought to the 1997 synod convention regarding the Lord's Supper. One lengthy memorial was brought by eleven pastors and included ten resolutions.⁷⁵ Another memorial was brought by fifty pastors and laymen, five congregations, and the elders of another congregation, asking the synod to adopt two additional

adoption of the revision. Dr. Erling Teigen registered his protest to the resolution, and Pastors Martin Teigen and Robert Lawson registered their negative votes.

⁷¹ Thomas Nass, "The ELS Lord's Supper Statement," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 125.

⁷² Nass, "The ELS Lord's Supper Statement," 125.

⁷³ Nass, "The ELS Lord's Supper Statement," 126.

⁷⁴ Nass, "The ELS Lord's Supper Statement," 126.

⁷⁵ 1997 SR, 177–89. One of the resolutions was in essence to revert to the 1989 version of the theses on the Lord's Supper and another to reject the other memorial brought on the Lord's Supper theses (see below).

subpoints as antitheses under Thesis Nine. With some slight emendations, the synod added the following subpoints to Thesis Nine.

9g. While one may hold a private opinion as to when the real presence begins, yet we reject the dogmatic assertion that in a valid celebration of the Lord's Supper it must be maintained that the body and blood of Christ are *immediately* present after the words of institution have been spoken by the pastor, or the dogmatic assertion that it must be maintained that the body and blood are present only in the reception.

9h. We reject the dogmatic assertion that the remaining elements in a valid celebration of the Lord's Supper must be consumed.⁷⁶

These additions were also to be considered the response to the other memorial.⁷⁷

With the addition of Thesis 9g & h, the official debate regarding the Lord's Supper seems to have come to a close. By this time, the Doctrine Committee was transitioning to a more thorough discussion of the doctrine of the ministry, with preliminary theses being considered.

What Were the Issues?

That all depends on whom you ask.

Prof. Nass, in an essay delivered to a WELS pastoral conference in 1989, said that the Lord's Supper debate in the ELS was really a reopening of the Saliger controversy since some were taking a "consecrationist" view. He believed that the WELS CICR statements, reflecting more of an "open question" approach to the moment of the real presence, promoted a more balanced approach.⁷⁸

Some say that the entire issue did indeed revolve around the moment of the real presence. Yet, how is the "moment" defined? Dr. Erling Teigen comments:

It has been said that nowhere in the Confessions is a time set at which the real presence is effected or comes into being. That may

⁷⁶ 1997 SR, 78. The May 1997 minutes of the Doctrine Committee mention that the committee was not opposed to the essence of the memorial asking for these additions. The full text of the theses is in Appendix B.

⁷⁷ 1997 SR, 79.

⁷⁸ Thomas P. Nass, "The Moment of the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper," Mankato Area Pastoral Conference of the ELS in New Prague, MN, October 3, 1989. Accessed at <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/3400>.

very well depend on what one means by “time” or “moment.” However, the confessional passages which are cited in the Formula of Concord make it clear that what is distributed is the body and blood of Christ, *under the forms of bread and wine*. The distribution must certainly take place temporally *before* the reception, and so it would seem clear to the most humble common sense that *at the time of the distribution* there is both bread and body and wine and blood. There is no hint of any qualification that only bread and wine are distributed and that only with the reception or the completion of the *actio* is the real presence effected or known with full certainty. The Confessions clearly believe that what is distributed *by the hand of the administrant* as the instrument of Christ is the true body and blood of Christ.⁷⁹

He continues:

And certainly what is temporal has, by definition, a beginning and an end. While we will not quarrel about which “instant” or “syllable,” we will quarrel about “beginning”; whether it is at the beginning of the *Verba*, the middle or the end we do not care. But we will have to say that with the utterance of Christ himself, through the recitation of his word in the sacramental action, he himself effects his presence so that the real presence comes into being in the sacrament. The real presence is not identical with Christ’s omnipresence, which does not go out of existence. But the real presence does exist only in the sacrament and, therefore, ceases when there is no sacramental action. Therefore, in the temporal, durative moment of the sacramental *actio*, what is on the altar, what is distributed by the hand of the pastor, as if by Christ himself, and what is eaten by the lips and mouths of the communicants is his body and blood.⁸⁰

At the 1988 General Pastoral Conference, he had stated, “It is not the moment we are concerned with. It is the power of the effective word.”⁸¹

Recall the memorial submitted to the 1995 synod convention which stated in part,

⁷⁹ Erling T. Teigen, “The Consecration of the Lord’s Supper in Luther and the Book of Concord,” ELS General Pastoral Conference, January 8-10, 1980, 13. Emphasis original.

⁸⁰ Erling T. Teigen, “The Consecration of the Lord’s Supper in Luther and the Book of Concord,” 20. Emphasis original.

⁸¹ Personal minutes of the 1988 General Pastoral Conference by Rev. Theodore Gullixson.

Johannes Saliger, quoting the words of Johannes Wigand, in the struggle leading up to the Formula of Concord [sic] speaks for us, when he says, "Of the moment, that is of the time of the consecration, or when and at which time under which syllables the body and blood of Christ are present, one certainly not frivolously ask; but as soon as the word of the Lord Christ has been spoken and sounded, the simple faith accepts such plain, clear words of Christ and believes."⁸²

President Schmeling cautioned in 1995:

When one makes definite statements about when and how Christ's body and blood are present in the bread and the wine, and when dogmatic demands are made about what must be done with the remaining elements, then he is going further than Scripture or the Confessions. When we delve into these things and are consumed by them we are dangerously close to speculative and presumptuous questions that are not wholesome to faith and life. Such things were never raised to dogma by our forefathers. They were not made doctrinally binding because they were not based on clear Scripture. Rather, we are urged to avoid delving into the hidden things of God.⁸³

Again, did the debate about the Lord's Supper revolve around the moment of the real presence? It appears to me that it did, *in this sense*: those who were insisting on the "moment" of the real presence were emphasizing the consecratory power of the words of institution, a commendable emphasis, to be sure.⁸⁴ However, in making their case so strongly, it is almost inevitable that the "moment" had to be fixed (not precisely, such as the syllable, but still fixed). Such a fixing of the moment was in agreement with Dr. B.W. Teigen's arguments in his book regarding what Chemnitz held in this matter. Also, it seems logical that if one insists that the body and blood of Christ are on the altar, one has determined the "moment."

I am told that there were some among our fellowship that *were* underemphasizing the importance of the words of institution, so it

⁸² 1995 SR, 188.

⁸³ Schmeling, "The Lord's Supper in the ELS Today," 8.

⁸⁴ This emphasis on the part of some seemed to have originated with some statements made by WELS brothers that leaned toward mild receptionism.

almost seems appropriate to push back—perhaps too strongly—in the other direction.

Were there benefits to this decades-long debate in our midst? It is unfortunate that “sides” were taken and opinions and beliefs expressed so vehemently that relationships were damaged, with derogatory labels being applied to those holding this position or that. But the intense study precipitated by this debate resulted in a proper emphasis on how our Lord’s body and blood come to be present in the Supper: he instituted by his words,

[T]he words of institution ... spoken or sung distinctly and clearly before the congregation and ... under no circumstances to be omitted. Thereby we render obedience to the command of Christ, “This do ...” And thereby the elements of bread and wine are hallowed or blessed in (for) this holy use, so that therewith the body and blood of Christ are distributed to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says, “The cup of blessing which we bless,” which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution. (FC SD VII) [LSQ](#)

Appendix A

Theses of the Doctrine Committee on the Lord’s Supper

1981 SR, 75–76

On the basis of the Words of Institution (Matthew 26:26,27, Mark 14:22,24, Luke 22:19,20, I Corinthians 11:23–25) and other Scripture passages concerning the Lord’s Supper (I Corinthians 10:16,17 and 11:26–29),

1. We hold with Luther that “(the Sacrament of the Altar, instituted by Christ himself) is true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink.” SC VI (Tappert)

2. We hold that “in the Holy Supper the two essences, the natural bread and the true natural body of Christ, are present together here on earth in the ordered action of the sacrament, though the union of the body and blood of

Christ with the bread and wine is not a personal union, like that of the two natures in Christ, but a sacramental union..." SD VII 37,38

3. We hold that this sacramental union is in effect during the *usus* or *actio*: "Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the divinely instituted action (that is, if one does not observe Christ's institution as he ordained it, it is no sacrament). This rule dare not in any way be rejected, but it can and should be profitably urged and retained in the church of God. In this context "use" or "action" does not primarily mean faith, or the oral eating alone, but the entire external and visible action of the Supper as ordained by Christ: the consecration or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or the oral eating of the blessed bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ." SD VII 85,86

4. We hold that "it is the institution of this sacrament, performed by Christ, that makes it valid in Christendom, and that it does not depend on the worthiness or unworthiness of the minister who distributes the sacrament or of him who receives it, since, as St. Paul says, the unworthy receive the sacrament too. Therefore (we) hold that, where Christ's institution and command are observed, the body and blood of Christ are truly distributed to the unworthy, too, and that they truly receive it." SD VII 16

5. We hold that it is the almighty Word of Christ "which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a sacrament which is rightly called Christ's body and blood... 'When [if] the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament.' ... The Word must make the element a [sic] sacrament; otherwise it remains a mere element." LC V 10

6. We hold that "No man's word or work, be it the merit or the speaking of the minister, be it the eating and drinking or the faith of the communicants, can effect the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper. This is to be ascribed only to the almighty power of God and the Word, institution and ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ." SD VII 74

7. We hold that the Words of consecration repeated by the minister in a proper celebration of the Sacrament are the effective means by which the real presence of Christ's body and blood is brought into being. "For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ himself is still active through the spoken words by the virtue of the first institution, which he wants to be repeated.... 'No human being, but only Christ himself who was crucified for us, can make of the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God's power and grace through the words that he speaks, "this is my body," the elements set before us in the supper are blessed.' ... 'This his command and institution can and does bring it about that we do not distribute and receive ordinary bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words read "this is my body," etc., "this is my blood," etc. Thus it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that, from the beginning of the first Communion until the end of the world, make the bread the body and the wine the blood that are

daily distributed through our ministry and office.’ Again, ‘Here too, if I were to say over all the bread there is, “this is the body of Christ,” nothing would happen, but when we follow his institution and command in the Lord’s Supper and say, “this is my body,” then it is his body, not because of our speaking or of our efficacious word, but because of his command in which he has told us so to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.” SD VII 75–78

8. We hold that “the words of institution are to be spoken or sung distinctly and clearly before the congregation and are under no circumstances to be omitted. Thereby we render obedience to the command of Christ, ‘This do...’ And thereby the elements of bread and wine are hallowed or blessed in (for) this holy use, so that therewith the body and blood of Christ are distributed to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says, ‘The cup of blessing which we bless,’ which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution.” SD VII 79–82

9. We hold that we cannot fix from Scripture the point within the sacramental *usus* when the real presence of Christ’s body and blood begins, yet we know from Scripture and we acknowledge in the Confessions that what is distributed and received is the body and blood of Christ.

Theses of the WELS CICR on the Lord’s Supper

1981 SR, 77

In the matter under discussion we need to study Christ’s words of institution in Matthew, Mark, Luke and in I Corinthians; as well as Saint Paul’s additional statements about the Lord’s Supper in I Corinthians 11 and 10. On that basis we can establish the following concerning the essence of the *usus* of the Lord’s Supper (consecration, distribution, reception):

1. The real and substantial presence of Christ’s body and blood during the *usus*.

2. The sacramental union of bread and wine and of Christ’s body and blood during the *usus*.

3. The oral manducation of bread and wine and Christ’s body and blood by *all* the communicants during the *usus*.

4. The real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the *usus* is brought about solely and alone by the power of Christ according to the words of institution, that is, by his command and promise.

We accept this statement (Point 4) with the understanding that:

a) The real presence is effected solely by the original words of institution spoken by our Lord (*causa efficiens*) and repeated by the officiant at His command (*causa instrumentalis*);

b) While we cannot fix from Scripture the point within the sacramental *usus* when the real presence of Christ’s body and blood begins, we know from

Scripture and acknowledge in the Confessions that what is distributed and received is the body and blood of Christ.

c) The Confessions do not assert more as a point of doctrine than the above, which is clearly taught in the Scripture.

Appendix B

ELS Theses on the Lord's Supper

Adopted June 1997

On the basis of the Words of Institution (Matthew 26:26, 27; Mark 14:22, 24; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–25) and other Scripture passages concerning the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 10:16, 17 and 11:26–29):

1. We hold with Luther that “[the Sacrament of the Altar instituted by Christ himself] is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink.” (SC VI, pp. 351)

2. We hold that “in the Holy Supper the two essences, the natural bread and the true body of Christ, are present together here on earth in the ordered action of the sacrament, though the union of the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine is not a personal union, like that of the two natures in Christ, but a sacramental union...” (FC SD VII 37, 38, p. 575f)

3. We hold that this sacramental union is in effect during the *usus* or *actio*: “Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the divinely instituted action (that is, if one does not observe Christ's institution as he ordained it, it is no sacrament). This rule dare not in any way be rejected, but it can and should be profitably urged and retained in the church of God. In this context ‘use’ or ‘action’ does not primarily mean faith, or the oral eating alone, but the entire external and visible action of the Supper as ordained by Christ: the consecration or words of institution, the distribution and reception, or the oral eating of the blessed bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ.” (FC SD VII 85, 86, pp. 584f)

4. We hold that “it is the institution of this sacrament, performed by Christ, that makes it valid in Christendom, and that it does not depend on the worthiness or unworthiness of the minister who distributes the sacrament or of him who receives it, since, as St. Paul says, the unworthy receive the sacrament too. Therefore (we) hold that, where Christ's institution and command are observed, the body and blood of Christ are truly distributed to the unworthy too, and that they truly receive it.” (FC SD VII 16, p.572)

5. We hold that it is the almighty Word of Christ “which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a sacrament which is rightly

called Christ's body and blood... 'When [if] the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament'... The Word must make the element a sacrament; otherwise it remains a mere element." (LC V 10, p. 448)

6. We hold that "no man's word or work, be it the merit or the speaking of the minister, be it the eating and drinking or the faith of the communicants, can effect the true presence of the body and blood of the Christ in the Supper. This is to be ascribed only to the almighty power of God and the Word, institution and ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ." (FC SD VII 74, p. 583)

7. We hold that the words of consecration repeated by the minister in a proper celebration of the Sacrament are the effective means by which the real presence of Christ's body and blood is brought into being. "For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ himself is still active through the spoken words by the virtue of the first institution, which he wants to be repeated ... 'No human being, but only Christ himself who was crucified for us, can make of the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God's power and grace through the words that he speaks, "this is my body," the elements set before us in the supper are blessed.' ... "This his command and institution can and does bring it about that we do not distribute and receive ordinary bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words read, "this is my body," etc., "this is my blood," etc. Thus it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that, from the beginning of the first Communion until the end of the world, make the bread the body and the wine the blood that are daily distributed through our ministry and office.' Again, 'Here, too, if I were to say over all the bread there is, "This is the body of Christ," nothing would happen, but when we follow his institution and command in the Lord's Supper and say, "This is my body," then it is his body, not because of our speaking or of our efficacious word, but because of his command in which he has told us so to speak and to do and has attached his own command and deed to our speaking.'" (FC SD V11 75-8, pp. 583-5)

8. We hold that "the words of institution are to be spoken or sung distinctly and clearly before the congregation and are under no circumstances to be omitted. Thereby we render obedience to the command of Christ, 'This do ...' And thereby the elements of bread and wine are hallowed or blessed in (for) this holy use, so that therewith the body and blood of Christ are distributed to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says, 'The cup of blessing which we bless,' which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution." (FC SD VII 79-82, p. 584)

9. We hold that we cannot fix from Scripture the point within the sacramental *usus* when the real presence of Christ's body and blood begins, yet we know from Scripture and we acknowledge in the confessions that what is distributed and received is the body and blood of Christ.

We understand Thesis Nine in the light of the following statements:

a) The words of consecration effect the real presence of Christ's body and blood in a valid administration of the Lord's Supper (consecration, distribution and reception).

b) Because of this consecration by virtue of our Lord's original institution "the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received." (AC X, p. 34; see AC XXII 6, p. 50; Ap X I, p. 179; Ap XXIV 80, p. 264; FC SD VII 10–11, p. 571) The Scripture and the Confessions, therefore, teach that in the Supper the body and blood of Christ are received by the communicant and also that the "minister who consecrates shows forth [tenders] the body and blood of the Lord to the people" (Ap XXIV 80, p. 264; see also SC VI 1–2, p.351; SA Part III VI 1, p. 311; AC XXII 6, p. 50; Ap X 4, pp. 179–80), that they are "truly offered with the visible elements" (FC SD VII 10–11, p. 571; see also Ap X 1, p. 179), and that they are "really present in the Supper ... under the form of bread and wine." (AC X, p. 34)

c) We reject any attempt to fix the mathematical point or exact moment when the real presence begins.

d) We reject the teaching that the presence of Christ's body and blood is in any way effected by the eating and drinking of the elements by the communicants.

e) We reject the doctrine of transubstantiation, i.e., that the earthly elements cease to exist when the real presence of Christ's body and blood begins.

f) We reject any celebration of the Lord's Supper without communicants.

g) While one may hold a private opinion as to when the real presence begins, yet we reject the dogmatic assertion that in a valid celebration of the Lord's Supper it must be maintained that the body and blood are immediately present after the Words of Institution have been spoken by the pastor or the dogmatic assertion that it must be maintained that the body and blood are present only in the reception.

h) We reject the dogmatic assertion that the remaining elements in a valid celebration of the Lord's Supper must be consumed; rather, we continue to uphold the practice of the church down through the years that the remaining elements may be consumed, or be disposed of in a reverent manner, or be saved for future sacramental use.

NOTE: References to and citations from the Book of Concord are according to the Tappert Edition.

The Word Not in Words: The First Lutheran Martyrs

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Vanity And Nothing

ON JULY 1, 1523, TWO SO-CALLED “HERETICS” were tied to the stake in Brussels and burned alive. Hendrick Vos and Johann van den Esschen, who were members of the Reformed Augustinian cloister in Antwerp, had been arrested nine months before for their profession of the Lutheran heresy. To deserve this fate, they did nothing but condemn the sale of indulgences and teach justification by faith alone.

Throughout their imprisonment and interrogations by the Dutch Inquisition, they refused to recant, knowing full well that in the Low Countries, heresy was tantamount to treason, meaning that teaching what they were teaching was punishable by death at the joined hands of church and state. “Once someone was convicted, there was no latitude. Penitence changed only the method of execution.”¹ And yet they remained steadfast, freely giving their lives for the pure gospel of Christ and the greater glory of God. And so Hendrick Vos and

¹ Mark Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517–1648* (New York: Viking, 2014), 375.

Johann van den Esschen burned as the first martyrs of the Lutheran Reformation.

However, in beginning to undertake a study of the first Lutheran martyrs, a Lutheran pastor is tempted to claim the first Lutheran martyr as God's servant Abel. After all, wasn't Abel the first to be killed for the sake of his faith in the promised Messiah? Wasn't Abel justified by the faith alone that produced his pleasing offering, rather than the offering itself (Heb. 11:4)?² And wasn't it for the sake of Abel's faith alone that faithless Cain's jealous rage overtook him, provoking him to bloody fratricide? Doesn't Abel's blood crying out to God from the earth set the chorus that all martyrs of Christ shall sing?

To a non-Lutheran, and likely to some Lutheran non-pastors, claiming Abel as a *Lutheran* martyr may seem like the brazen boast of revisionist history: those saucy Lutheran upstarts are appropriating Abel to support their soft spot for *Sola Fide*! Yet begin with Abel we must, for understanding Abel is important for understanding all martyrs for the gospel, and in particular those martyrs for the justification by faith revealed to us by God in Holy Scripture. As such, Abel sets the pattern for understanding the first Lutheran martyrs.

Luther notes Abel's pattern well. In his 1536 lectures on Genesis, he compares firstborn Cain to the faithless, vainglorious, persecuting false church that possesses all the honor and glory of the world, and contrariwise compares Abel to the humble, faithful remnant, the persecuted but true Church on earth, despised by bloodthirsty rulers and called heretics by spiteful priests:

[H]ere the church begins to be divided into two churches: the one which is the church in name but in reality is nothing but a hypocritical and bloodthirsty church; and the other one, which is without influence, forsaken, and exposed to suffering and the cross, and which before the world and in the sight of that hypocritical church is truly Abel, that is, vanity and nothing [i.e., הַבֵּל, vapor, futility, worthlessness].³

As the primogeniture, Cain assumes he and he alone is given the promise of the Messiah, but yet in his heart he does not understand

² "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks."

³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Publishing House, 1955-), 1:252. Hereafter *LW*.

that promise or trust the God who gave it. When he sees that Abel, the “worthless” second-born, secures God’s favor with his faithful offering, Cain’s self-satisfied and selfish heart burns with indignance that his brother should obtain God’s grace and promise outside the rights of the firstborn. The firstborn can do nothing to earn his Father’s favor. And, in fact, sin (and not blessing) crouches at the firstborn’s door.

Because Abel’s steadfast faith does not fail, Cain’s love does. Rage overflows his heart in violent murder, a murder which seems to him just and necessary. “For Cain it is not enough that he is the lord of the house; he also wants to be the Son of God; he wants to be the pope and the father of the church. Therefore he appropriates to himself the right to pass judgment on the sacrifices, and he condemns and slays his brother as a heretic.”⁴

It is easy to see how the situation between two brothers—one the firstborn and the other viewed as a worthless latecomer, one relying on his works and the other trusting with faith alone, one persecuting and the other persecuted—would remind Luther of the ongoing conflicts between the Roman papists and the evangelical Reformers.

Indeed, by the time of Luther’s lectures on Abel, many had been condemned and slain; many had been branded heretics while professing God’s Word; many had suffered, lost their property and wellbeing, been imprisoned, been stripped of titles and offices and honors; many had even given their lives for the sake of the gospel—and all as if the church of Cain was doing God a favor: “They have proceeded against us with utmost cruelty. Not in Germany only but also in other parts of Europe their rage has displayed itself against godly people. This sin, as if it were a pastime, the papacy regards as a trifling matter; nay, it even considers it a service rendered to God (John 16:2)⁵.”⁶

When explicating Genesis 4:10⁷ Luther makes the connection between Abel and the Lutheran martyrs more explicit, listing by name several of those whose blood had been (or would be) shed for the gospel, and so, like Abel’s, refused to remain silent.

There was Leonhard Kaiser, who preached in evangelical fashion and studied in Wittenberg, was arrested for his Lutheran leanings while visiting his sick father, put on trial before an imperial commission

⁴ *LW* 1:253.

⁵ “Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.”

⁶ *LW* 1:288.

⁷ “And the Lord said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.’”

(whose membership included Johann Eck), and, as he refused to recant, was burned at the stake on August 16, 1527.⁸

Before him came Hendrik van Zutphen, prior of Vos and van den Esschen at the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp, who was arrested under false pretenses for preaching the Lutheran heresy, escaped his imprisonment and fled Antwerp, was dragged from his bed in Dithmarschen in the middle of the night by a torch-wielding horde of vigilantes drunk on “Hamburg beer,” imprisoned in a cellar, and sentenced to burn, but, when his accusers could not get his pyre to light, was finally beaten to death on December 10 or 11, 1524.⁹

And in 1540 there will also be Robert Barnes, the so-called “Antonius Anglius” or “Anthony of England”, an English supporter of the Reformation, a friend of Luther and Bugenhagen, whom Thomas Cranmer sent to Wittenberg to consult the Reformers regarding Henry VIII’s marital (and extramarital) anxieties. He eventually fell foul of the king and his court, and was condemned without a hearing to burn as a “detestable heretic.”¹⁰ Barnes and two Lutheran pastors were executed alongside three Roman Catholic priests. All six men were executed for religious dissent in a nation whose religion was uncertain and as yet undecided.¹¹

Although Luther does not specify Vos and van den Esschen in his lecture on Abel’s blood, yet along with these steadfast men whom he praises by name Luther estimates “a thousand others” whose names bear less renown but whose lives share this glory of confessing Scripture and suffering martyrdom. It would not be unreasonable to suppose Luther also has the Antwerp Augustinians in mind. Like Abel, Luther instructs, “the blood of all these will not keep silence.”¹²

⁸ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*. Translated by James L. Schaaf. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 349–50.

⁹ See Luther’s own 1525 account of “The Burning of Brother Henry,” *LW* 32:261–86. Luther obviously was not an eyewitness to these proceedings, as then he himself most likely would not have lived to tell the tale. Rather, he pieced together the events based on information gathered from “the trustworthy reports of godly people,” *LW* 32:265.

¹⁰ William Dallmann, *Robert Barnes: English Lutheran Martyr* (Malone: Repristination Press, 2012), 43. How Barnes, who was burned at the stake July 30, 1540, is mentioned as a martyr in Luther’s 1536 lectures is likely explained as a later addition to Luther’s lecture notes by Veit Dietrich, according to footnote 45 in *LW* 1:288.

¹¹ See also Roy Long, *Saints, Sinners, and Martyrs: Lutherans and Lutheranism in the Early 16th-Century Reformation in Britain* (Cambridge: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, 2017) 17–8, 76–8; and Neelak Tjernagel, *Lutheran Martyr* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982), 150–9.

¹² *LW* 1:288.

And all these shared the honor of bearing the name of *Abel*, אֶבֶל, that is, they were considered worthless, futile, and nothing. Such is always the way of Christ's true saints, those not conformed to the pattern of this world, those bearing the hateful enmity of Satan. "Therefore the true church is hidden; it is banned; it is regarded as heretical; it is slain."¹³ Yet Abel, whom the world and the devil and the false church "despise as a worthless person ... is given a position before God as lord of heaven and earth. After his death he is in a better state than if he possessed a thousand worlds with all their goods."¹⁴

In his comments on Abel, Luther makes it clear that the seeds of all the martyrs—and thus the seeds of the martyrs in Luther's own time—were planted long before. Cain broke the man, but he could not break the mold: Abel is the prototype of heroic martyrdom for all who follow, including the martyrs of the Reformation. "The martyrs of the early church were required to say, 'Caesar is Lord.' When they refused, when they confessed, 'Jesus, and Jesus alone, is Lord,' they were fed to the lions or tied to the burning stake."¹⁵ The martyrs of the Reformation were required to say, "The Pope is Lord." When they refused and instead confessed "Jesus, and Jesus alone, is Lord," they were censured, censored, threatened, arrested, stripped of rights and property, defrocked, beaten, bloodied, beheaded, burned.

With this in mind, Luther frequently emphasizes the same three points when discussing Abel, the example of prior martyrs, and the contemporary martyrs witnessed in his own time:¹⁶

- 1) Martyrdom is not a human accomplishment, but a miracle of divine strength given to the martyrs by the Holy Spirit.
- 2) Martyrs by their faith are made perfect or whole in their martyrdom, as by their faith they do not die in misery but live in heaven.
- 3) Martyrdom proclaims to the whole world that Christ is Lord—and expands Christ's kingdom thereby. As it's said, "*Semen est*

¹³ LW 1:253.

¹⁴ LW 1:246.

¹⁵ Bryan Wolfmueller, *And Take They Our Life: Martin Luther's Theology of Martyrdom* (Around the Word, 2020), 19.

¹⁶ Douglas Strange identifies these three points and gives an excellent general summary of Luther's thoughts on martyrdom in "The Martyrs of Christ: A Sketch of the Thought of Martin Luther on Martyrdom," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37; no. 10 (November 1966). His summary of these three points occurs on 643–4.

sanguis Christianorum.” “The seed [of growth] is the blood of Christians.”¹⁷

That this sacrifice may seem to us at times superhuman is not a testament to the resiliency of the human spirit, but instead is the sacred testimony of the unfailing Holy Spirit. For “God overpowers and converts the world, not by force but through the blood and death of His saints. He overcomes the living through the dying and the dead. This is an amazing victory.”¹⁸

Through the blood of Abel, God overcomes Cain. That Abel dies and the earth swallows his blood is no matter, for he does not die but truly lives by the blood of His promised Messiah. Likewise, that men like Vos and van den Esschen were burned alive, reduced to smoke carried off on the breath of the wind—this too is no matter, for in their deaths they are made whole in the body of Christ, and Christ will keep their dust and ashes until His Day of resurrection of all flesh. Burning them to ash did not silence them, but, in fact, sent them out on the wind into all the world with their powerful testimony. “The martyrs are proof that the kingdom of God stands not in words, but in power [1 Cor. 4:20]. Affliction has a promise.”¹⁹

A Viper’s Nest of Heretics

Before we consider Vos and van den Esschen’s deaths, we must first consider the context in which they lived and served. Both men were friars in the German Reformed Congregation of Augustinians (or the “Observants”), which arose in response to a general laxity among the Augustinian Order in adherence to their rule. In particular, many monks loosely practiced the dedication to personal poverty and sharing communal goods, and dispensations from canonical hours and common table practices were pervasive. Historian Adolar Zumkeller has suggested this laxity came about due to widespread loss of life and social order during the plague years of 1348–1351, and divisions within the Western Church and Augustinian Order as a result of the Great Western Schism (1378–1414).²⁰

¹⁷ Tertullian, *Apologeticus* L.13. Often rendered as “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

¹⁸ *LW* 32:268.

¹⁹ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 103.

²⁰ Robert J. Christman, *The Dynamics of the Early Reformation in their Reformed Augustinian Context* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 22.

The Reformed Congregation Observants desired to return to the “golden age” of the Augustinian Order by renewing obedience to the rule and recapturing the essence of monastic life. “Observants regarded themselves as the green branches on the languishing tree of the Church,” and to this end a series of monasteries in Italy and Germany joined together in the fifteenth century to return to the original rule of their orders; this union between monasteries disregarded the preexisting boundaries of the official provinces of the Church or the order.²¹ The result was that Observant congregations, while not being sovereign from Rome and the pope, were still able to act with increasing independence from them.

Luther himself belonged to this Reformed Congregation of Augustinians. Even later, as Professor of Theology at the University of Wittenberg, Luther maintained personal contact with the Order and the Reformed Congregation within it, as between 1502 and 1522, approximately 160 Augustinians attended the University of Wittenberg.²² Beginning in 1512, Luther held the position of head of the Wittenberg cloister’s *studium generale* (a preparatory school that equipped young Reformed Augustinians to attend university). And many audience members at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518 consisted of representatives from the Congregation’s cloisters, who left impressed with Luther’s forty theses. “As a result, many of the ranking members of the German Reformed Augustinians were won over by Luther’s soteriological views.”²³

The Antwerp branch of the Reformed Augustinians was founded in 1513 as part of an expansion strategy led by Johann von Staupitz to establish new Reformed friaries in the Low Countries. After purchasing land, the initial small group of Augustinians constructed a chapel and soon began holding services. However, this was all accomplished “without the permission of the powerful canons of the Church of Our Lady, who, to a large degree, dictated the religious life and ecclesiastical politics of the city.”²⁴ Particularly aggravating to the canons was the fact that the services held at the new chapel led to a reduction in attendance—and donations—to the Church of Our Lady.

The canons sought counsel from their legal representative, Adrian Floriszoon, a prominent member of the theology faculty at the

²¹ Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*. Translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 52.

²² Christman, *Dynamics*, 40.

²³ Christman, *Dynamics*, 42.

²⁴ Christman, *Dynamics*, 49.

University of Leuven and former tutor of Charles V. As Floriszoon also served as dean of the chapter of the Church of Our Lady, he aggressively took the canons' side on the matter, issuing a "cease and desist" letter to the tiny Augustinian friary, wherein he demanded the closure and destruction of its chapel, and that all profits gained from donations be remitted to the Church of Our Lady.²⁵ After the Observants did not respond, Floriszoon repeated his order, this time threatening citation before the papal court and excommunication if the friars failed to comply.

The case was ultimately presented before the Council of Brabant (the territorial government) and the Antwerp city council, both of which agreed that the Augustinians should be allowed to proceed with establishing their cloister in the city. The city council promised that if the canons dropped the matter, "the city would find ways to remunerate them."²⁶ Eventually the two parties reached an agreement, mediated through Floriszoon; notably present for this agreement was one of the cloister's founding members, Johann van den Esschen.

Thus, the Church of Our Lady and its canons resented the presence of the Augustinian cloister from its inception. And Floriszoon was forced to negotiate the concession that allowed the cloister to remain.

With Staupitz's support, the cloister expanded between 1514 and 1516. In 1518, Jacob Probst was appointed prior. Probst attended the University of Wittenberg from 1505 to 1508 (and was one of Luther's students during that time) and served as prior in Wittenberg from 1515 to 1518. There he witnessed firsthand the immediate response to Luther's *Disputation on the Power of Indulgences* (95 Theses) and the resulting controversy. Additionally, it is likely that Probst assisted in translating Luther's writings into Dutch, which began appearing in Antwerp in 1519.²⁷

In Probst's tenure as prior, the Antwerp Augustinians became notable for preaching justification by faith alone, as well as for their open criticism of the sale of indulgences. These messages "resonated with the populace so that they were compelled to add balconies in their church, and crowds stood outside the windows to hear them preach."²⁸ This popularity attracted the attention of admirers and enemies alike.

²⁵ Christman, *Dynamics*, 50.

²⁶ Robert J. Christman, "The Antwerp Martyrs and Luther's First Song," *Lutheran Quarterly* 36; no. 4 (Winter 2022), 376.

²⁷ Hans Wiersma, "Sts. Johann, Hendrik, and Henry, the First Martyrs of the Reformation," *Lutheran Forum* 43; no. 2 (Fall 2011), 27.

²⁸ Christman, "Antwerp Martyrs," 377.

Friends included Albrecht Dürer, who painted Probst's portrait and gave it to him as a gift, and also Erasmus, who praised him in a letter to Luther: "In Antwerp there is a prior in the [Augustinian] cloister, a genuine Christian with nothing false about him, who glows with love for you; a former student of yours, as he boasts. He is virtually the only one who preaches Christ. Nearly all the others simply prattle and think of profit."²⁹

However, as Luther's writings spread through the Low Countries—despite Charles V's special measures to enforce *Exsurge, Domine* (1520) and the Edict of Worms (1521) there—the evangelical preaching of the Antwerp cloister did not go unchallenged. Dominican friars in Antwerp battled back for the hearts and the minds of the people with special vehemence: "one said he wished he could fasten his teeth on Luther's throat, and would not hesitate to go to the Lord's Supper with that blood on his mouth."³⁰ High profile opponents of Luther's teaching in the Low Countries were papal legate Girolamo Aleandro (known as "Aleander") and Margaret of Savoy, Charles V's aunt, who was governor of Charles' territories in northwestern Europe.³¹

Due to its open borders and reliance on international commercial trade, the Low Countries offered fertile ground for evangelical ideas to spread freely. However, the government was also equipped to act rapidly through quick legislation and tight provincial courts.³² Since Charles V believed that national strength and peaceful social order required unity of religious belief, and as the economy of the Lowlands provided him with half of his total revenue per year, the Roman Catholic Emperor paid particular attention to prosecuting heresy in Flanders and Holland.³³ Heresy was considered tantamount to treason (being treason against God), and, as such, bore the punishment of death or lifelong banishment and the confiscation of property. Yet even so, the Antwerp Augustinians continued to preach to an interested audience from 1519 to 1523.³⁴

This produced the novel situation that, even as Luther's writings were banned and burned, all the placards and pronouncements

²⁹ Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther* (New York: Viking, 2017), 300.

³⁰ Will Durant, *The Reformation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 633.

³¹ Wiersma, "First Martyrs," 27.

³² Wim Blockmans, *Emperor Charles V: 1500–1558*. Translated by Isola van den Hoven-Vardon. (Arnold Publishers: London, 2002), 99.

³³ Durant, *The Reformation*, 632. Durant estimates that the Low Countries produced Charles a yearly income equivalent to ~\$400,500,000 (adjusted for inflation).

³⁴ Michael A. Mullett, *Martin Luther* (London: Routledge, 2004), 217.

condemning them and threatening prosecution for heresy against those who read them instead *advertised* their theology all the more, and Luther's translation of the New Testament continued to enjoy wide circulation.³⁵ A letter sent to Martin Bucer succinctly sums up the situation: "Luther is burnt every day in the Low Countries and yet it is said that he has more supporters there than anywhere else. The emperor just follows the pope."³⁶

And in Emperor Charles V's view, Luther represented not just a break from the traditions of the church, and not simply a deviation from commonly agreed upon teaching, but instead a potential collapse of social order and good government. In the emperor's mind, "Luther's revolt against Rome was at the same time a revolt against the whole Christian tradition"; it threatened to dismantle more than one thousand years of human labor in Christendom.³⁷

Acting as a defender of the true faith and the Catholic Church, Charles brought the Inquisition to the Netherlands and gave its officials whatever power was necessary to eliminate the Lutheran heresy and those that assisted its spread. And since Charles couldn't get to Luther due to the various protections offered in Germany, he could instead go after the other Reformed Augustinians that persisted in promulgating Luther's writings. Antwerp especially was a "viper's nest of heretics."³⁸ And due to the legal and religious control Charles was able to exert in the Low Countries, in Antwerp "it was easier than in German lands for Charles to get a friar to the stake."³⁹

Following his return to the Lowlands after the Diet of Worms, Charles was so eager to combat the *Lutherei* that, instead of waiting for approval from ecclesiastical authorities, he established his own state-run Inquisition. Rather than viewing this as usurpation of church authority, Pope Adrian VI supported it, approving it with his imprimatur in 1522. A likely reason for this is that Pope Adrian VI was also Charles' former tutor and the former dean of the chapter of the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp—Adrian Floriszoon, the same man who years earlier sent an

³⁵ Durant, *The Reformation*, 633.

³⁶ Blockmans, *Emperor Charles V*, 100.

³⁷ Gertrude von Schwarzenfeld, *Charles V: Father of Europe*. Translated by Ruth Mary Bethell. (Henry Regnery Company: Chicago, 1957), 75–6.

³⁸ Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed*, 354.

³⁹ Craig Harline, *A World Ablaze: The Rise of Martin Luther and the Birth of the Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 263.

ineffectual cease and desist letter to the Antwerp Augustinians and had failed to dissolve their cloister.⁴⁰

On December 6, 1521, after Antwerp prior Jacob Probst had returned from additional studies in Wittenberg, the chief inquisitor, Frans van der Hulst, invited him to Brussels for a so-called “friendly conversation.”⁴¹ Upon his arrival, Probst was immediately arrested. He was kept imprisoned for eight weeks, brutally interrogated by the state Inquisition, and held under the ever-present threat of being dragged to a heretic’s stake at any moment.

After two months of such treatment, Probst agreed to recant thirty articles of his preaching that were deemed heretical. On February 9, 1522, Probst publicly recanted from the pulpit of St. Gudula’s Cathedral in Brussels, openly denouncing Luther and his writings.⁴² His recantation affirmed the Roman teaching of justification and especially emphasized the institutional authority of the pope and church tradition. It concluded: “And I damn all errors and heresies, especially the Lutheran ones. And I embrace the Catholic faith as held and preached by the Holy Roman Church. And I promise to submit myself in faith to all things that it teaches. And I now declare, just as I have promised and declared, to adhere [to it] and to cast Luther with all his dogmas far away from me.”⁴³

The full text of Probst’s recantation was immediately published and disseminated as propaganda. He walked free but was not allowed to return to his Augustinian brothers in Antwerp, and so was transferred to a cloister (unaffiliated with the Observants) in Ypres, his hometown. When Luther heard the fate of his former student, he somberly realized the severity of the situation: “This is no longer a joke or a game, but it will now become serious, and it will exact life and blood.”⁴⁴

However, shortly after arriving in Ypres, Probst began preaching in an evangelical, Lutheran fashion once again. In response, in May of 1522, Probst was once again imprisoned and brought before the Inquisition. Hearing no news about him, Luther and Staupitz presumed he had been burned at the stake for recanting his recantation. Luther wrote to Staupitz, “[Thus] the sophists are swiftly preparing their own destruction, which will come to them because of the innocent blood they are shedding. Amen. They are planning to burn me at the stake,

⁴⁰ Cristman, *Dynamics*, 56.

⁴¹ Cristman, *Dynamics*, 58.

⁴² Wiersma, “First Martyrs,” 27.

⁴³ Christman, *Dynamics*, 58–9.

⁴⁴ Christman, *Dynamics*, 59.

too.”⁴⁵ However, Probst, with the assistance of several friends, escaped his imprisonment and fled safely back to Wittenberg, finally arriving there in August.

Meanwhile, over the summer of 1522, the Reformed Augustinians appointed Hendrik van Zutphen as Probst’s successor in Antwerp. Zutphen was another former student of the University of Wittenberg and lived alongside Luther in the Augustinian cloister there. At the beginning of Zutphen’s tenure, the cloister seems to have quieted down and kept a low profile. However, once indulgence salesmen entered Antwerp, Zutphen defied the ban on evangelical preaching and began denouncing indulgences, “first from the pulpit, then in the streets.”⁴⁶

It then appears that, on a visit to Antwerp in late September, Governor Margaret of Savoy (Charles V’s aunt) heard one or a number of Zutphen’s sermons and took great offense to the teachings therein.⁴⁷ On September 29, 1522, Michaelmas, Zutphen was called away from the cloister to the aid of an ailing parishioner. There was no ailing parishioner; Zutphen was instead arrested. Imprisoning him in St. Michael’s abbey overnight, Margaret planned to send him to Brussels for interrogation. Thus began Governor Margaret’s final crackdown on the nest of heretic vipers in the Antwerp cloister.

Following Zutphen’s arrest, Margaret cleared house. On October 6, all of the remaining friars were arrested. Those who were natives of Antwerp were allowed to remain imprisoned in the city, but all others were spit up, carted off, and jailed in various other locations. Like Probst, their former prior, the “Augustinians were prosecuted under the terms of the Worms edict.”⁴⁸

Over the winter and spring, the Augustinians were kept imprisoned under presumably harsh conditions until they recanted—which most did. Only eight friars remained. But when it was made clear to them that their unwillingness to disavow Luther’s teaching meant death by fire, five recanted and were released. Three, however, refused: Hendrick Vos, Johann van den Esschen, and Lambertus Thorn. Sixty-two articles of heterodox faith were leveled against them, “sufficient evidence to condemn the three Augustinians as heretics.”⁴⁹

The three were interrogated again, and again refused. But then the date for their burning was announced, and a once hypothetical

⁴⁵ *LW* 49:12–3.

⁴⁶ Christman, “Antwerp Martyrs,” 379.

⁴⁷ Christman, *Dynamics*, 67.

⁴⁸ Wiersma, “First Martyrs,” 27.

⁴⁹ Wiersma, “First Martyrs,” 28.

immolation suddenly became a looming reality. Vos and van den Esschen still outright refused to recant. Thorn asked for additional time to consult the Scriptures. Four days were granted to him; he would die in prison five years later.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, following the October 6 raid of the cloister, Margaret removed the Eucharist from the monastery's chapel and with great pomp led a procession with it across town in order to reconsecrate it at the Church of Our Lady—the same church that ten years prior failed to shut the Reformed Augustinians down and take their profits. Margaret disbanded the cloister, and on January 16, 1523, had all its buildings razed to the ground. She spared only the chapel in order to convert it into a parish church.

Although heresy was treason and punishable by death, only the ecclesiastical Inquisition could authorize an execution for it. Therefore, in order to sentence and burn Vos and van den Esschen, Charles' state-run Inquisition had to wait for approval. Pope Adrian VI (Adrian Floriszoon) obliged him. Vos and van den Esschen were scheduled to burn on July 1, 1523.

Floriszoon's threats in 1513 to close, destroy, and despoil the cloister, and excommunicate its remaining members were finally enacted, with the Augustinians as heretics and Floriszoon a pope. And, what's more, when in 1513 the cloister had been granted permission to remain active (contrary to Floriszoon's priorities), Floriszoon himself had visited the friars to facilitate the agreement. "When, less than a decade later Vos and van den Esschen were executed, the latter, at least, was no mere abstraction for Pope Adrian. The two had met face to face."⁵¹

A Te Deum From the Flames

These days, it is quite common to see the public burning of a person's reputation for expressing "heretical" ideas, but the culture has (up to this point, at any rate) drawn the line at burning bodies. It can therefore be difficult for a modern audience to understand the complex theological motivations behind the burning of condemned heretics. A brief overview of the significance of death by fire will provide context for what Vos and van den Esschen's sentence of burning alive was intended to accomplish and convey.

Taking cues from passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Romans 12:4–8, and Ephesians 4:3–16, Medieval theologians often

⁵⁰ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 301.

⁵¹ Christman, "Antwerp Martyrs," 376–7.

conceived of the Christian community as the body of Christ, joined together into one unified whole by *caritas* (love). And God's love was like a fire, ignited and enlightened by the Word, spreading from believer to believer. In the fire of God's love, all were united together. Those whose hardened hearts were not melted in the fire of God's love were destined to burn in different fashion in the fires of Hell. Thus, the flames of the heretic's pyre were thought of as extensions of the fires of hell, but also as extensions of Christ's burning love for His church. "In this scheme, there were two burning bodies that defined human collective identity and destiny, and those who did not burn one way had to burn in another."⁵²

Late Medieval theologians argued that the underlying principle beneath the violence of a heretic's execution was mercy, a gesture of Christ's love for the heretic to ease the heretic's own suffering and the suffering he might cause others. In his work *De Fide et Legibus* (*On Faith and Laws*), French theologian and Bishop of Paris William of Auvergne reasoned that

[T]he execution of the heretic is actually an act of mercy, taking from them the opportunity to commit further crimes that would certainly increase their ultimate sufferings in Hell. While confirmed heretics will still be damned, the faithful can spare them some increase in their tortures, and so it can be said "they therefore profit from the death of their bodies."⁵³

The heretic's death by flames was most obviously a sign of condemnation. But alongside this, those same fires were also a symbol of the redemptive, unifying love of the church, which, if it could not purify the heretic by fire, would then limit the heretic's tortures—and excise the heretic's disease from the church—by that same fire.

Today it is popularly thought that diversity of religious belief contributes to the strength of a culture and society. But in the sixteenth century, religious belief was no mere matter of private faith or personal opinion; rather, religious belief was a key component of one's public identity: "Christ's own body on earth was a shared body and its moral or spiritual hygiene was a public issue, since what one did with one's own body rebounded to other Christians as well as God. Likewise, what one did spiritually or intellectually affected others through this common

⁵² Michael D. Barbezat, *Burning Bodies: Communities, Eschatology, and the Punishment of Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 7.

⁵³ Barbezat, *Burning Bodies*, 29.

bond.”⁵⁴ Or, to put it another way, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9).

Without a common, universally shared faith (a “catholic” faith), there was no national unity, and therefore no national strength. In the Middle Ages, heresy was fought as a matter of both church and state, as “religion was understood to constitute a way of life and a key basis for the political order.”⁵⁵ For the sake of public health, malignant members must be removed from the body politic of Christ, “limbs amputated to preserve the rest of the body in good health.”⁵⁶

In Pope Innocent III’s 1199 decretal *Vergentis in senium* (“Approaching old age,” from its first line, “*Vergentis in senium saeculi corruptelam*,” “the corruption of a world advances to its old age”) he reasoned that, since the corporate identity of Christian society is the body of Christ, and since the pope, as Christ’s earthly representative, acted as the earthly governor of that body, therefore, departing from the traditional teaching of the church (and, by implication, the pope) constituted a spiritual treason far worse than any treachery against an earthly crown, and should rightly be punished not only with the execution of the offender, but also with the seizure of their goods. “Following the logic of the decretal, the pope as Christ’s earthly representative was the most sensible authority to identify what constituted a departure from the faith that offended Christ’s majesty.”⁵⁷ Pope Innocent III’s ideas on treasonous heretics would later be codified at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which “admonished the secular powers to ‘exterminate’ (*exterminare*) all those designated as heretics by the Church from their jurisdiction,”⁵⁸ either by banishment or execution.

This set not only the theological, but also the legal and social backdrop for future attempts at reform in the earthly church. Those who would seek systematic reform of corrupted morals or wayward traditions might find themselves accused of heresy in the process. Pope Innocent III had decreed the papacy was “the most sensible authority” to safeguard against heresy, but then people like Jan Hus “fulminated against worldly and corrupt clergy from the parish priest to the Pope, asserting that

⁵⁴ Barbezat, *Burning Bodies*, 23.

⁵⁵ Jack Kilcrease, “Reformation Martyrs,” LutheranReformation.org, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://lutheranreformation.org/history/reformation-martyrs/>.

⁵⁶ Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed*, 353.

⁵⁷ Barbezat, *Burning Bodies*, 28.

⁵⁸ Barbezat, *Burning Bodies*, 28.

many popes had been heretics.”⁵⁹ They responded by burning Hus at the heretic’s stake.

In 1520, Luther conceded that *some* of Hus’s articles condemned at the Council of Konstanz were true. But following the Diet of Worms in 1521, he revoked this concession: “he now affirmed that they were all true, and that popes and papists, in condemning Huss at Constance, had also condemned the gospel, and in its place put the doctrines of the dragon of hell. From that time on, Luther was an uncompromising champion of Huss as a man of God.”⁶⁰ And so, in the same way that “Hussite” had been an instant accusation and immediate condemnation in the century before, the name “Lutheran,” “*Lutherei*,” would become an indictment for the first Reformation martyrs, rendering them guilty until proven innocent, not worthy of safe conduct, a fair trial, or a just sentence, worthy only of extermination by the most speedy means available—all for the alleged health of Christ’s body, to the greater glory of God, and in the name of Christian love.

In the precedent of Hus’ writings, trials, and example, Luther saw clearly that the gospel could in fact be persecuted and condemned *within the church itself*, and that the pure truth of Scripture could be added to, subtracted from, tinkered with, and even denied by those entrusted with its faithful proclamation. Being condemned as a heretic by bishops, councils, and popes was by no means a guarantee of heresy; being burned at the stake at the hands of the church simply for proclaiming the unvarnished gospel of Christ was by no means outside the realm of possibility.

This leads us back to Brussels, where the three remaining faithful Augustinians sat imprisoned for the sake of Luther’s writings and their steadfast profession of justification by faith alone, apart from works or indulgences or the word of a pope. They were threatened with death partly as a condemnation for their persistence in proclaimed errors, but also as a sign of the church’s mercy toward their souls (sparing them future errors and worse torments in hell) and the souls of others, who were not to be led astray from their salvation in the church of Rome under the banners of the pope.

A panel of professors of sacred theology from the University of Leuven assembled for the final examination, all dressed in abbots’ miters with bejeweled shoes and staves, headed by the grand inquisitor

⁵⁹ David Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1989), 117.

⁶⁰ David S. Schaff, *John Huss: His Life, Teachings and Death* (Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1915), 294.

Jacob van Hoogstraten and chief inquisitor Frans van der Hulst. Being a layman official in Charles' state inquisition, van der Hulst served as secular inquisitor. However, following Pope Adrian VI's (Floriszoon's) imprimatur, this secular authority was also named the official papal inquisitor on June 1, 1523—only one month before the scheduled executions.

Throughout the examination, all three Augustinians agreed in their responses during the initial proceedings (until Lambertus Thorn asked for additional time to consult the Scriptures), but it appears that Vos in particular distinguished himself before the commission, being “a handsome young man, well educated and eloquent in speech.”⁶¹ Based on information from various available accounts,⁶² we are able to piece together a rough transcript of certain portions of the proceedings.

COMMISSION: What is your belief?

AUGUSTINIANS: We believe the 12 articles of the Christian faith, the Biblical books and Apostolic writings, and the holy church, but not the church which you believe in.

C: Don't you believe the statutes and councils of the old fathers?

A: As long as they are not contrary to Holy Scripture we believe them.

C: Don't you believe that it is a deadly, unforgivable sin to break the Pope's and the fathers' commandments?

A: We believe that God's commandments and not human statutes save or condemn.

Van Hoogstraten then presented 25 articles of evangelical faith the three bore the guilt of professing, in particular that God alone and not the pope had the power to forgive sins, to bind and loose, and

⁶¹ C. J. Hermann Frick, “They seem like roses to me (Voes on the pyre),” *Martyrs of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: M. Neidner, 1853). Accessed online: <https://www.projectwittenberg.org/etext/histories/martyrs/martyrs3-12.asc>. Accessed July 13, 2023.

⁶² This paper's account of events is summarized primarily from the following sources: John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Accessed online: <https://www.exclassics.com/foxe/foxe153.htm>. Accessed July 13, 2023; C. J. Hermann Frick, *Martyrs of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church*; “An Account of the Divestment and Burning of the three Christian Knights and Martyrs of the Augustinian Order, which occurred in Brussels on July 1, 1523,” a July 1523 pamphlet translated in full in Christman, “Antwerp Martyrs” 380–1; “The Story of two Augustinians Burned in Brussels for the sake of the Gospel,” anonymous pamphlet, selections found in Christman, *Dynamics*; and the account of sixteenth-century historian Johannes Sleidanus, *Warhafftige beschreibung*, quoted in Christman, *Dynamics*.

that the pope was just as sinful a human being as any other priest. Van Hoogstraten demanded once more that they recant.

A: No, we will not recant, but would much rather die for the sake of the Christian faith.

C: Then you will burn if you do not recant.

A: We are entirely willing to do so, and are happy that God has been so gracious as to allow us to die for the Christian faith.

Lambertus Thorn did not respond in such a manner: it was at this point that he asked for additional time to consult the Scriptures to see whether he should recant. A momentary lapse in steadfastness, perhaps. Yet also consider his eight months imprisoned under dreadful conditions, his interrogation by the officers of the Inquisition, then the reality of his death by being burned alive. This requires a certainty that one is staking one's life on the truth of God's Word. Consider Luther's own request for time at Worms. And consider also the fact that Thorn was still imprisoned at his death five years later in 1528. This demonstrates a different kind of steadfastness, the steadfastness of the slow lonely death as opposed to the brief public one.

Meanwhile, as Thorn was led back to the prison, Vos and van den Esschen remained before the commission. It appears that Vos, in his gift of eloquence, answered for both of them during the following questions.

COMMISSION: It is evident that you have been led astray by Luther.

VOS: Yes, we were led astray by him, even as were the Apostles led astray by Christ.

C: But it is forbidden to read Luther's books.

V: All those who forbid the reading of Luther's books and writings are seizing more power and forbid more than God's Spirit demands. They also publicly challenge Holy Scripture, which says to put all to the test and "keep what is good" [1 Thess. 5:19], and again to "test the spirits whether they are from God [1 J. 4:1]."

C: These sections of Scripture are not relevant because the church herself forbids Luther's books and bans them.

V: Even though there are several of Luther's articles which have been banned by bull issued by Pope Leo X, nevertheless these articles are right and true, and have therefore been banned without cause. The church has not banned and forbidden Luther's books.

C: Then you will die by fire.

V: I can very well see that there is not one word of God among and with the members of the commission. I do not care for my life; my soul I commend to God. But the time will come when the Lord Jesus will scrutinize your threats.

At times throughout their examination, the commission also peppered in the sweet talk of false friendship and promises of deliverance. (We might call this strategy “Good Inquisitor, Bad Inquisitor.”) At one such offer of faux friendship, Vos replied, “I see you are trying to deceive me with oily words.” During the last moments of the examination, grand inquisitor van Hoogstraten promised that if they recanted, he had the authority to free them then and there. Vos replied as the Lord did to Pilate: “You have no authority but that given you from above.”

Finally, seeing that neither threats nor promises could squeeze a recantation from them, the commission gave up its efforts. Van Hoogstraten formally sentenced Vos and van den Esschen as heretics, worthy of death by burning. The work of the church being accomplished, they were turned over to state authorities for enactment of the sentence. Under the authority of the Council of Brabant, the highest law court and the emperor’s imperial authorities in that region of the Netherlands, the two were returned to prison. Throughout their long imprisonment, interrogations, examinations, and execution, “the charges against the men were never publicly stated.”⁶³ Rather, the sixty-two specific articles of alleged heresy that condemned them were only published later in an anonymous pamphlet, and even then may have been obtained only after an official was bribed.⁶⁴

In the early morning hours of July 1, 1523, workers constructed a stage in the Grand Plaza of Brussels in front of City Hall, at its center a makeshift altar for performing the necessary Roman rites and ceremonies of defrocking the friars before their deaths. The stage was surrounded with chairs to accommodate the expected audience of church authorities and laypeople alike. The public had not been informed of the date of the execution, in order to prevent large crowds of visitors from other cities—and perhaps to prevent the evangelicals from organizing a show of support for the two so-called heretics.

⁶³ Christman, *Dynamics*, 70.

⁶⁴ Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 145.

The Augustinians were dressed “in the full ecclesiastical regalia of their order” and led in a pompous procession to the site of their ceremonial degrading.⁶⁵ The procession included the professors and doctors from the University of Leuven tasked with the examination, as well as the Inquisition officials, the bishop, and various other ecclesiastics. Vos was brought forward first to be defrocked and dressed in a yellow tunic as a sign of mockery. While this happened, a Franciscan Superior preached a sermon to the crowd. After the ceremony and sermon concluded, Vos is reported to have called out loudly, “I thank you Lord that you have liberated me from this false and hideous priesthood of which I was a member heretofore, that you are making me a priest of your holy order, receiving me as an acceptable sacrifice.”⁶⁶ Next van den Esschen was similarly defrocked, placed in a long, black gown representing his sinfulness.

Their hands bound, they then were turned over to the executioner, who led them to the pyre in the marketplace of the Grand Plaza. Four father confessors walked alongside them, constantly urging them to recant. Instead, the two men praised God with rejoicing voices, demonstrating remarkable courage and cheer. When the confessors urged recantation, they replied that they rejoiced that God had given them the grace to die for His Word. This was the day for which they had been waiting. One father confessor criticized them for self-praise and boasting, to which Vos replied, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of Christ.” When another confessor called out that they should turn their eyes to God, Vos said, “I am certain that He is in my heart.”⁶⁷

As they arrived at the pyre the father confessors began to weep for them. “But the two Augustinians told them that they should not cry on their account, but rather over their own sins; and they should weep at the great injustice being done, namely the persecution of godly righteousness.”⁶⁸ Eyewitnesses reported that the fire was kindled very slowly, and as the Augustinians waited, they clung to the stake as if with longing for some long-sought treasure.

It took a half hour to keep the kindling alight—one witness pondered whether the delay was intentional, so as to prolong the agony of the accused⁶⁹—and the whole while, the Augustinians comported themselves with confidence, steadfastness, and even joy, repeatedly

⁶⁵ Wiersma, “First Martyrs,” 28.

⁶⁶ Frick, *Martyrs*.

⁶⁷ Frick, *Martyrs*.

⁶⁸ Christman, “Antwerp Martyrs,” 381.

⁶⁹ Frick, *Martyrs*.

expressing that they desired to die for the name of Christ. When the fire finally caught in the kindling, they were offered one final reprieve to recant. “You will go to the devil, dying in the devil’s name!” the father confessors yelled. “We will die for the sake of evangelical truth,” they replied, “as pious Christians.”⁷⁰

The flames were set to the pyre, and as the tongues of red fire lapped hungrily at the wood, one of the steadfast Augustinians said, “*Die schijnen mij als Rosen to zyn*,” “They seem to me to be like roses.”⁷¹ As the smoke rose around them, they joined in praying the Creed and singing psalms and hymns, and as the flames devoured and dissolved the raw wood under their feet, they sang the *Te Deum laudamus*, “We praise Thee, O God!”⁷² Following this, they called out “Lord, Lord, O Son of David, have mercy on us!” for as long as they had air. As the ropes that bound them to the stake burned away, one of them fell to his knees—refusing to flee the flames—folded his hands, and cried out as he suffocated, “Lord, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!”⁷³

Thereafter, nothing was heard from them but the crackle of flames. But yet, even as they burned to dust, the echo of *Te Deum laudamus* lived on in the minds and memories of many witnesses, and could not be silenced in the hearts of those guilty of their blood. “And the Lord said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground’ (Gen. 4:10).” The songs cried out by such blood cannot be silenced, but resound in the singing of the church, and are but a foretaste of the everlasting song of joy that the martyrs even now are singing in all of heaven’s bliss and glory. We merely wait to join them.

Joyfully Allow the Lord to Slay Us

Though oftentimes treated as a peripheral incident among the important events of the early Reformation,⁷⁴ the martyrdom of Vos and van den Esschen marks the key transition from a battle of intense theological debate and punitive threats to a battle of fire and blood. “These

⁷⁰ Christman, “Antwerp Martyrs,” 381.

⁷¹ Frick, *Martyrs*.

⁷² See James A. Krikava, “Te Deum Laudamus: History and Use,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 53; nos. 2–3 (June–September 2013), 238–9.

⁷³ Christman, “Antwerp Martyrs,” 381.

⁷⁴ Christman, *Dynamics*, 12. Christman makes the accurate assessment that in general histories of the Reformation, this event is often treated as a distant, isolated incident, largely unconnected to what was happening in Wittenberg and the early Reformation. Some surveys of the Reformation even fail to mention it. If mentioned at all, the effect it had on Luther is often reduced to his exploiting it for propagandistic purposes (an inaccurate oversight, to say the least).

witnesses took Reformation teachings beyond publications and pulpits into the domain of dramatic public action,⁷⁵ and so the Word was no longer in words alone but in action, in power. The effect it had on Luther altered the course of Reformer and Reformation alike.

Luther first received the news at the University of Wittenberg near the end of July. A messenger—Johannes Kessler, one of the students that had unknowingly met the undercover Luther at the Black Bear Inn on Luther's return from Wartburg in 1522—delivered the news that two Antwerp Reformed Augustinian friars had been burned at the stake as heretics for professing the evangelical faith. “[Luther] began to cry silently, and said, ‘I thought I would be the first to be martyred for the sake of this holy gospel; but I am not worthy of it.’”⁷⁶

For Luther, however, this was not simply a matter of sorrow and tears. He immediately also gave thanks to Christ for making new martyrs for His gospel. And the gospel's presence was not made known through earthly rule and triumphalism (the glory of Cain), but instead by the power of God made perfect in weakness and suffering, in the head of grain that falls to the ground dead in order to bring forth life at its final consummation in Christ's return. “Luther did not measure the Reformation's ‘progress’ or ‘failure’ by approval and growth in popularity,” but rather in martyrdom.⁷⁷ New martyrs meant the gospel had finally returned. The bright, hot light of the martyrs' pyre was grievous, but it also signified that “the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land” (Song. 2:11–2).

These words from Song of Songs inspired Luther's response to the burnings in Brussels. The painful news caused him to do something he had never done before: write a hymn.⁷⁸ And, reflecting the fact that the earthly loss of martyrs was nothing but gain for Christ's church, he thereby discovered a talent and passion for hymn writing, a talent that would profoundly influence not only the Reformation but also Christian worship for the next five hundred years (and counting).⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 145.

⁷⁶ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 103.

⁷⁷ Oberman, *Luther*, 265.

⁷⁸ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 302.

⁷⁹ The first Lutheran martyrs thus produced the first Lutheran hymn. A fair question: without Vos and van den Esschen, would there be a *Mighty Fortress*? Yet in the words of one wiser than me, “I do not entertain hypotheticals; the world as it is is vexing enough.”

He modeled his hymn after the popular musical form of folk ballad, containing simple but dramatic language that conveyed heroic thrills and striking horrors alike, sung by wandering minstrels and common people in marketplaces, roadsides, and taverns.⁸⁰ With this genre Luther intended to get the word of the martyrs out as quickly and widely as possible. In August, 1523, “A Lovely Hymn About the Two Martyrs of Christ Who Were Burned in Brussels by the Sophists of Louvain” (known by its more approachable first line, *Eyn news lied wyr heben an*, “A New Song Here Shall Be Begun”), was published as a low-cost broadsheet.⁸¹ Though intended as a popular song, it was later included in the 1524 Wittenberg hymnal for use in the divine service.⁸² ELH 556, *Flung to the Heedless Winds*, is a shortened adaptation of this hymn.

For his first hymn, Luther began with familiar words, taking inspiration from the initial verses of Psalms 96 and 98, both of which exclaim, “sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things!” (Psalm 98:1). He seems to have relied on elements from Psalm 98 in particular, as if responding directly to the psalmist’s invitation to “sing a new song.” “For Luther, the events in Brussels were one of God’s marvelous deeds that required song, a new song.”⁸³

Luther begins by invoking God to help the singing of this new song, for God Himself brought about the events that inspired it, showing “the wonders of His hands” in the two martyrs, “whom He with favor truthful / So richly hath adorned.”⁸⁴ Covering the events of their examination, defrocking, and burning, Luther contrasts the steadfastness of John (van den Esschen) and Henry (Vos) with the guileful tricks of the “Louvain sophists” who act as puppets of “the old arch-fiend.” Much to their shock, the fiend and the sophists are overthrown by “two such youngsters.” The kingdom of God is not in intellectual talk or clever words but in power (1 Cor. 4:10), and God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). The boys bravely go to their death “with singing and God-praising.”

In two verses believed to have been added later, after the hymn’s first publication, Luther indicates an attempt by some to silence reports of the event, accusing those who “would gladly gloze it over” of betraying a guilty conscience by trying to cover up facts. Yet “good Abel’s blood

⁸⁰ LW 53:212.

⁸¹ Mullett, *Martin Luther*, 217.

⁸² LW 53:212.

⁸³ Christman, “Antwerp Martyrs,” 383.

⁸⁴ The words quoted here are taken from LW 53:214–6. For the reader’s reference, they are also provided in the Appendix.

outpoured / Must still besmear Cain's forehead." Their ashes are scattered, but that only means they can fly into every corner of the world with their testimony: "Stream, hole, ditch, grave—nought keeps them still / With shame the foe they spatter." The song of the martyrs has spread to the world, and "in every land, / In tongues of every people" the martyrs' voices still "go gladly singing."

In the final two verses, Luther dismantles the Roman Catholic propaganda being spread that Vos and van den Esschen had in their last breaths "repented and recanted" thanks to an eleventh-hour intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the execution had been purposefully scheduled on the eve of the festival of Mary's Visitation). This false report began from the hand of the chief inquisitor, Frans van der Hulst, in a letter he penned to a cleric the very same day Vos and van den Esschen died. Van der Hulst reported that, in the final moments before they died, "They embraced once more the holy Catholic church, adding of their own accord 'Roman' to this phrase. [And] they entreated the bystanders ... [to remain] in the faith of their parents, their predecessors, and of the prelates of the church, convinced that our lord, the pope, was the true successor to Peter, etc."⁸⁵ Van der Hulst encouraged his recipient to spread the word about this supposed recantation.

It is quite convenient to the aims of the Roman church at this time that in their final breaths while being consumed in fire, the Augustinians could so eloquently and verbosely recant exactly those points the inquisitors demanded of them. Van der Hulst's use of "etc." here is perhaps quite telling—they said all the correct things about the faith of the prelates and the pope, and so forth, you already know and can supply the rest. That van der Hulst provides an accurate description of the execution's outcome is highly unlikely.⁸⁶

Luther addresses this rumor in the hymn's final verse, saying, "Let them lie on forevermore— / No refuge is so reared; / For us, we thank our God therefore, / His Word has reappeared." Against the lies of the enemy, against the pope's claim to lordship, God's Word always prevails. The hymn that opens as a "new song" closes with the promise of a new spring, paraphrasing the above-quoted words of Song of Songs 2:11-12: "Even at the door is summer nigh, / the winter now is ended, / the tender flowers come out and spy; / His hand when once extended / Withdraws not till He's finished."

⁸⁵ Christman, *Dynamics*, 130.

⁸⁶ Christman, *Dynamics*, 130.

But Luther's literary output regarding the Augustinians did not end with poetry. Immediately following the executions, Luther also composed a letter of comfort to the faithful evangelical Christians in the Netherlands, sent as a printed leaflet for distribution. In it, he opens with a reference to the same verse that provided inspiration in *A New Song*, Song of Songs 2:12: "[W]e were compelled to submit to the terrible powers of darkness and serve such disgraceful errors of the Antichrist. But now the time is come when the voice of the turtle[dove] is heard and flowers appear on the earth."⁸⁷

The letter to the Netherlands reflects all of Luther's common themes when speaking of the martyrs. Rather than an oppression, it is a joy and privilege to know Christ and "suffer shame and injury, anxiety and distress, imprisonment and death, for Christ's sake."⁸⁸ For a long time the church had been pressed to pray to sham saints, but now, finally, genuine saints and true martyrs testifying to Christ alone appeared again. The "two precious jewels of Christ, Henry and John," are dear to God, for He in His grace has chosen them—and the people of the Netherlands—to be the first to shed their blood and die for the evangelical faith. For the martyrs do not die in misery but instead live in heaven's glory. "With what gladness and joy all the angels must have looked upon these two souls! How welcome must that fire have been which hurried them from this sinful life to eternal life yonder, from this ignominy to everlasting glory!"⁸⁹

This is a similar point that Luther will emphasize in his later lectures on Abel in Genesis 4: "When Abel is slain by his brother, he becomes the first to be freed from sin and from the misfortunes of this world; and throughout the entire later church shines like a brilliant star through the distinguished testimony concerning righteousness which God and all Scripture gives him."⁹⁰ This is the same comfort he gives to the persecuted Christians in the Netherlands. Not only is a greater glory being accomplished in them, but they are being held up as a shining example to the world that Christ is Lord and lends His divine strength to His people:

⁸⁷ Martin Luther, "Letter to the Christians in the Netherlands, August 1523," *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*. The Library of Christian Classics XVIII. Translated by Theodore G. Tappert (London: SCM Press, 1955), 193.

⁸⁸ Luther, *Letters*, 193.

⁸⁹ Luther, *Letters*, 193.

⁹⁰ *LW* 1:245.

He has given us a new and fresh illustration of His own life, and now it is time that the Kingdom of God should be not in word but in power [1 Cor. 4:20] ... Because, then, we see our present tribulation and have such strong and comforting promises, let us renew our hearts and be of good courage and joyfully allow the Lord to slay us.⁹¹

Luther at first thought Lambertus Thorn was also dead. A pamphlet intended to incite maximum hostility to the ecclesiastical authorities initially reported that Thorn burned three days after Vos and van den Esschen.⁹² This pamphlet, which was reprinted in several major cities throughout the Holy Roman Empire, likely provided Luther with the first details of the proceedings against his Augustinian brothers. First published only a few days after Vos and van den Esschen's deaths, the pamphlet perhaps assumed that Thorn would not recant in the time given him and would soon follow his companions to the stake; either that, or it fabricated the event entirely as opportunistic propaganda against the Roman church.

Regardless, Luther eventually learned that Thorn had not been executed after the others but instead was still imprisoned. He wrote Thorn a personal letter of comfort and encouragement, dated January 19, 1524. In it, Luther offers Thorn the consolation that he is not alone or forgotten. Christ is imprisoned with him and is suffering with him. Christ is in fact *in* him, having brought into his heart the holy knowledge of Himself that is hidden from the world.

Luther does not count Thorn as any different than Vos and van den Esschen, instead indicating that all three provide the same example and testimony. "He strengthens you inwardly by His Spirit in these outward tribulations and consoles you with the double example of John and Henry. Thus both they and you are to me a great consolation and strength, to the whole world a sweet savor."⁹³ The reference is to Exodus 29:18, the burnt offering to the Lord for the consecration of priests, "a pleasing aroma...to the Lord." All three Augustinians—and all martyrs with them—are a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma, a fragrant incense for the consecration of Christ's Church.

Luther shares with Thorn only one regret: "Alas, though I am the first to teach these things, I am the last to share your chains and fires,

⁹¹ Luther, *Letters*, 193.

⁹² Christman, "Antwerp Martyrs," 382.

⁹³ Luther, *Letters*, 198.

and perhaps I shall never be found worthy to share them.”⁹⁴ The specter of imprisonment and death that had threatened Luther since Worms became a reality—but not for Luther himself.

This is a thorn that seems stuck in Luther’s side throughout his life: Luther was not the first Lutheran martyr, or second, or third. The martyrdom granted to others was passing him by. Though always willing to make the ultimate sacrifice if necessary, he was not found worthy enough to be given the opportunity by Christ. While others rotted in prisons, he slept safely in his own bed. While others died with glory, he suffered the shame of staying alive. If the martyrs are the glory of the Church, and the Church is the glory of Christ as a wife is the glory of her husband (1 Cor. 11:7), Luther seemed always the bridesmaid but never the bride. A common gibe of the day haunted his conscience: “instead of being a martyr he was making martyrs.”⁹⁵

While Luther worried that he would not be martyred, others worried that he would. Following Luther’s friendly kidnapping by agents of Frederick the Wise, Reformation ally Albrecht Dürer received a false report that the man condemned at Worms was dead. He wrote in his diary: “I know not whether he lives or is murdered, but in any case he has suffered for the Christian truth. If we lose this man, who has written more clearly than any other in centuries, may God grant his spirit to another ... O God, if Luther is dead, who will henceforth explain to us the gospel? What might he not have written for us in the next ten or twenty years?”⁹⁶ Thankfully, Luther was not dead and the world was allowed to find out what he would write.

Luther martyred would be a glorious testimony to the death-conquering power of Christ made manifest in man’s weakness. But likewise, the fact that Luther was never martyred served as a glorious testimony to the unconquerable power of the gospel at work in the world. If grace was given to the martyrs, it was also given to those whom God preserved from danger. Either way, God would not allow His Word to be silenced. Luther viewed the preservation of his earthly life as a self-reproach, but his survival truly served as a reproach to his enemies, who could not slay him. At Luther’s funeral, Johann Bugenhagen referenced the cooked goose Hus, “reminding Catholic opponents that Luther had died in his bed: ‘You may cook a goose, but in a hundred years’ time

⁹⁴ Luther, *Letters*, 198.

⁹⁵ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 205.

⁹⁶ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 149.

there will come a man you will not be able to roast.' His point was that God's truth could not be smothered."⁹⁷

The Blood of All These Will Not Keep Silence

We have left one soul hanging. Hendrik van Zutphen, the Reformed Augustinian prior whose preaching incited Governor Margaret of Savoy to despoil and decimate the Antwerp cloister—we have left him imprisoned within the walls of St. Michael's abbey on the night of September 29, 1522. Lured away from safety by a false report of an ailing parishioner, he was instead arrested, to be sent to Brussels for interrogation at the hands of Charles V's state Inquisition.

That same night, however, a crowd angered by Zutphen's arrest (comprised mostly of women, we are told)⁹⁸ broke down the doors of St. Michael's, freed him, and then snuck him back to the Augustinian cloister. He successfully hid there for three days. Escaping the city, he fled to Bremen with intentions to head for Wittenberg. However, during his stay in Bremen the people persuaded him to preach a sermon at St. Ansgar's chapel on the Sunday before St. Martin's Day, and "he so captivated his hearers that they enjoined him to stay and preach regularly ... which he agreed to do."⁹⁹

This call did not come without its share of opposition. When Zutphen's preaching became known to the canons, priests, and monks of the parish, they attempted to get him expelled from the city. When this did not work, they cited him to appear before a provincial synod in Buxtehude, where they had more legal latitude than Bremen; there they planned to proceed against him as a heretic. The elders and parishioners refused to let him attend. The canons published and posted *Exsurge, Domine* and the Edict of Worms around the city and sent clerics to Zutphen's services to intimidate and spy on him; Zutphen kept on preaching.

In fall of 1524 Zutphen received a request to preach up north in Dithmarschen. Despite opposition and warnings from his parish, Zutphen was determined to go: "the people of Dithmarschen had no preacher at all. For this reason he could not with a good conscience refuse their request."¹⁰⁰ He'd been preaching in Bremen for two years, but the people of Dithmarschen had not yet heard the gospel. Zutphen

⁹⁷ Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed*, 321.

⁹⁸ Wiersma, "First Martyrs," 27.

⁹⁹ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 301.

¹⁰⁰ *LW* 32:277.

promised his people he would remain there only a short time. He would be back among them very soon.

He preached a sermon on December 4 and two more on December 6, St. Nicholas Day, garnering immediate admiration and support from the parishioners. Seeing this, Franciscan and Dominican agents plotted to silence him however they could. They agreed to capture him in the middle of the night and throw him at once into the fire before he could open his mouth.

They assembled a mob in the village at nightfall, at the sound of the Ave Maria bell, plied them with three barrels of Hamburg beer, ensured they were armed, and incited them against Zutphen. At midnight they broke into his lodgings and threw him from his bed, naked except his nightshirt. They drank all night and dragged him through the cold winter streets, attempting to bind him in chains but failing, and eventually locking him in a cellar until a morning council could be called. While they waited, they drank and drank and mocked him as a fool.

In the morning it was decided without any trial or hearing that he would burn as a heretic. But, as it was winter, and as they were drunk, they could not get a fire lit. They expressed their frustration by beating Zutphen with halberds and pikes for two hours. They tied him to a ladder in order to hold him over the flames (whenever they would eventually succeed in lighting the fire); one man stood with a foot on his chest and tied his neck to a ladder rung, trying “to strangle him, since he saw that in spite of his many wounds he was unable to die.”¹⁰¹

Someone attempted to raise the ladder in the air by propping it up with his halberd. But, as Luther reports, “the halberd slipped off the ladder and pierced the holy martyr of Christ through the middle.”¹⁰² The mob tried to throw the ladder onto the pile of wood. It fell off. Finally, someone took his mace and struck Zutphen’s chest until he stopped moving. They charred his body on glowing coals because they couldn’t keep the fire burning.

Back in Bremen, a familiar friend mourned the appalling loss: Jacob Probst, the Antwerp prior before Zutphen, who had recanted his evangelical faith after brutal interrogation by the Inquisition. After his recantation, Probst was reassigned to a cloister in Ypres, but then once more preached in evangelical fashion. He escaped arrest and fled to Wittenberg, but eventually wound up in Bremen. Following Zutphen’s

¹⁰¹ *LW* 32:286.

¹⁰² *LW* 32:286.

death, Probst took over his pastoral duties and served as a faithful preacher of the gospel.

Upon hearing of his friend Zutphen's horrific demise, the fellow former Antwerp prior lamented, "my soul is sorrowful to the point of death," repenting of the fact that he had recanted while Zutphen had not, and filled with regret that he himself had lost his chance at martyrdom: "Ah, if I had had only a single droplet of such grace and constancy, I would now be free of all cares, at rest in the Lord."¹⁰³

Probst wrote to Luther, informing him of Zutphen's death, and encouraging him to write to the Bremen congregation. Just as Luther sent letters of consolation and encouragement to the Christians in the Netherlands following Vos and van den Esschen's deaths, as well as to Lambertus Thorn upon learning of his continuing imprisonment, so also in early 1525 Luther sent a letter to the Christians in Bremen, the former flock of "Brother Henry."

In his letter, Luther once more emphasized that dying for the gospel was no defeat and bore no shame, but instead was a shining testimony of the glory of God and the power of Christ at work in His people. "It was one of God's miracles that he did not accomplish things by force, but by the suffering and death of his saints."¹⁰⁴ To die for God's Word is a priceless treasure, a precious gift, the noblest of deaths. Such martyrdom demonstrates that God has visited His people and is in their very midst. Through their pastor, God "attested his Spirit and power in your midst so obviously that you can almost touch it."¹⁰⁵

Along with this letter, Luther drew up a detailed account of "The Burning of Brother Henry" based on eyewitness reports and previously published pamphlets regarding the event (one of them authored by Probst). It makes for grisly reading, yet leaves no illusions about what happened to Zutphen—and who, exactly, is to blame. Yet these souls are not to be cursed, but pitied and prayed for. There is more reason to weep for them than for Brother Henry. Through their killing and persecuting they only kill themselves. Luther also included a short exposition of Psalm 9, David's song of the wonderful deeds of the Lord, who has turned his enemies back, making the wicked and all memory of them perish. The psalm promises comfort for the afflicted and judgment for the nations, two themes that Luther's exposition particularly draws out.

¹⁰³ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 145.

¹⁰⁴ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 349.

¹⁰⁵ *LW* 32:267.

In Luther's introductory letter to the Bremen Christians, he also mentioned the shining example of other martyrs that came before Zutphen, first and foremost "John and Henry at Brussels."¹⁰⁶ Luther also informed his readers that between the executions of the three Augustinians, others have also suffered martyrdom across Europe. The burning in Brussels kindled a radiant light for the gospel, which goes forth and bears witness to Christ in all the world.

There was Caspar Tauber, a Viennese merchant who was beheaded and then burned in that city on account of the Word of God on September 17, 1524, executed on the basis of the Edict of Worms.¹⁰⁷ A little book about him was published afterwards, giving the event some notoriety.¹⁰⁸ Then there was also George Buchführer, a bookseller burned to death in Hungary, likely for selling Luther's books. Yet another man was burned at the stake in Prague for leaving his monastic order and getting married.

Luther writes that these men and all others like them are the ones "who will preserve the Word of God in its truth and purity against the impure profaners of the Word." God in His grace has raised them up as witnesses to the right doctrine, which they themselves taught, believed, and confirmed with their martyrdom, "just as the holy martyrs long ago died for the sake of the gospel and with their blood sealed and certified it for us."¹⁰⁹

In addition to this, many others had given their lives for the sake of the gospel, or would do so in the coming years ahead. Only a month after the burning of Vos and van den Esschen, on August 8, 1523, Jean Vallière, another Augustinian monk, was martyred in Paris, "where Staupitz had once urged Dr. Luther to flee, thinking it would be safe."¹¹⁰

There was George Winkler, a young pastor at the Stiftskirche in Halle who had been a zealous papist and friend of Archbishop Albert of Mainz, until in 1524 he embraced evangelical teaching and developed a friendship with Luther. When he began to administer the Sacrament under both kinds, he was summoned to a hearing before the archbishop. During his return to Halle, on April 23, 1527, he was murdered. Efforts to track down his assassin were minimal. Luther suspected Archbishop

¹⁰⁶ *LW* 32:266.

¹⁰⁷ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 349.

¹⁰⁸ See *LW* 49:91 n21.

¹⁰⁹ *LW* 49:91

¹¹⁰ Harline, *World Ablaze*, 263.

Albert of Mainz was complicit in the murder, an inkling he hinted at in a letter he sent to the Christians at Halle.¹¹¹

Then there was Leonhard Kaiser, another friend of Luther who had preached in evangelical fashion until forbidden to do so in 1524. He then went to study in Wittenberg in 1525. While visiting his mortally ill father in 1527, he preached in Raab and was arrested. After being interrogated by an imperial commission, he was burned at the stake on August 16. Kaiser's death was greatly troubling to Luther, but also greatly encouraging as well: "As an 'emperor' (*Kaiser*) he had vanquished the devil. He, the former priest, had offered himself as the supreme sacrifice. And 'Leonhard' (the lion-hearted) had indeed displayed the strength and bravery of a lion."¹¹²

Then there were those martyrs across the water, such as Patrick Hamilton in Scotland, burned at the stake on February 29, 1528, for preaching Lutheran sermons, in particular on the distinction between law and gospel. And there was Robert Barnes of England, sent by Henry VIII as an envoy to meet with the Wittenberg Reformers, and then later betrayed and sent to the stake in London on July 30, 1540, for professing justification by faith alone. In great admiration, Luther later composed prefaces to Barnes' *Protestation* (his final public statement from the stake before his execution) and his *Lives of the Pontiffs*, the last such preface Luther wrote before his death.¹¹³

Then there was ... well, the list goes on, and on, and on, and if brevity is in fact the soul of wit, we could easily find ourselves witless in our attempt to speak of them all. Yet by the grace of God they all testify to the same everlasting truth of Christ alone as Lord and faith alone as the way of His justification.

In Luther's lectures on Abel, when listing but a few of the martyrs of his time, he adds, "I am saying nothing about a thousand others who, although their names were less renowned, nevertheless were comrades of these men both in the confession of their faith and in their martyrdom. The blood of all these will not keep silence."¹¹⁴ For their blood sings out to God, and the blood of Christ has cried out for their forgiveness and claimed them for His salvation (*ELH* 283 v. 4).

They will not be forgotten, for the Lord Himself knows all of them by name and has given each His glorious crown of life. Just as He tells

¹¹¹ See "A Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle" (1527), *LW* 43:140–65.

¹¹² Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 350.

¹¹³ Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 184.

¹¹⁴ *LW* 1:288.

us, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And He who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’” (Rev. 21:3–5).

Te Deum Laudamus

The story of the first Lutheran martyrs is, in essence, the story of the Church, in the Old Testament crying out in birth pangs as it awaited the coming of Christ, and then in the New pursued and persecuted through the wilderness of this world as it awaits Christ’s return (Rev. 12). The church of this world, the church of Cain, in all its promises and glories rises up against Christ’s Church time and again, inspired by the wickedness of sinful desire crouching at its door and prompted by the murderous loathing of the devil.

This was the prototype set before us by Abel, the first to die for justification by faith alone, and, in fact, the first human to die. “And through his *faith*, though he died, he still speaks” (Heb. 11:4). It is a powerful testimony of Abel’s blood to note that the very first human death ever was a martyrdom. (I wonder too if the very last human death of this earth before Christ’s return will also be a martyrdom.)

The prototype sets the pattern. Luther recognized this, not only by the enlightening example of Hus a century before but by the example of all the faithful martyrs Luther spoke of often and loved to commend (of particular note, Sts. Agnes and Agatha, who went to their deaths “as if to a wedding or a dance”¹¹⁵). And so Luther was not surprised in his own time to see those clinging to justification by faith alone viewed with suspicion, mocked, hated, arrested, condemned, killed. Time and again we see that Luther’s response to martyrdom is one of rejoicing, praise, and thanks—in a word, Luther’s response is *singing!*

And this same testimony of joyful song comes to us with far greater weight and glory in the mouths of those who “loved not their lives even unto death,” who with Christ Himself “conquered [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony [μαρτυρίας]” (Rev. 12:11). Vos and van den Esschen, the two young Augustinians, were the first of the Reformation to be transformed to such a pattern. They conquered, not by mere speech but by the power of Christ (1 Cor. 4:20), in sacrifice

¹¹⁵ Strange, “Martyrs of Christ,” 643.

and song. As they were tied to the stake and the flames were kindled, the two jolly friars sang the *Te Deum*.

We pray for God's grace and strength to flourish in us, that by His Spirit's power our hearts may burn for the living Christ, and that we also may bear with steadfast patience and humility whatever cross He lovingly calls us to bear. With this in mind, we who have suffered comparatively little by way of persecution and martyrdom—but yet who are beginning to suffer in increased ways and by intensifying means in these latter days of sore distress—we consider the ancient words of St. Augustine, regarding contemplation of the steadfast martyrs of old: “We should not hesitate to imitate that which we like to celebrate.” Luther himself repeated these words in 1518, little knowing how soon the imitation and celebration of the martyrs would become a necessity.¹¹⁶

If we do indeed see increased persecution, slander, hatred, imprisonment—and even should we see bloodshed and murder—then any such tribulation is not a curse, but rather a celebration, a cause for rejoicing among us, for, in Luther's words of comfort to the Christians in Bremen after the martyrdom of their pastor (Hendrik van Zutphen), this only means “the quality of true Christian life has been restored.”¹¹⁷ For as horrible as the example of suffering and persecution is, yet “these are precious and pleasing in God's sight; as the Psalter puts it: ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints’ [Ps. 116:15]; and, ‘Precious shall their blood be in His sight’ [Ps. 72:14].”¹¹⁸

If we must bear the cross before the crown (as our Lord promises), if we must face fire before triumph and shame before splendor (as our Lord assures us), then what of it? We simply join the choiring chant of eternity. We simply join the cross and crown of Christ. We join the two young friars caroling from the flames, *Te Deum laudamus!* “God, we praise You!” We simply go on singing. LSQ

¹¹⁶ Strange, “Martyrs of Christ,” 643.

¹¹⁷ Martin Luther, “Letter to the Christians in Bremen, March, 1525,” *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 209.

¹¹⁸ Martin Luther, “Letter to the Christians in Bremen, March, 1525,” *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 209.

Appendix

Texts of *A New Song Here Shall Be Begun* and *Flung to the Headless Winds*
(*ELH* 556)

A New Song Here Shall Be Begun

M. Luther, 1523

Trans. George MacDonald & Ulrich S. Leupold

LW 53:214–6

- 1 A new song here shall be begun—
The Lord God help our singing!
Of what our God himself hath done,
Praise, honor to him bringing.
At Brussels in the Netherlands
By two boys, martyrs youthful
He showed the wonders of his hands,
Whom he with favor truthful
So richly hath adorned.

- 2 The first right fitly John was named,
So rich he in God's favor;
His brother, Henry—one unblamed,
Whose salt lost not its savor.
From this world they are gone away,
The diadem they've gained;
Honest, like God's good children, they
For his word life disdained,
And have become his martyrs.

- 3 The old arch-fiend did them immure
With terrors did enwrap them.
He bade them God's dear Word abjure,
With cunning he would trap them:
From Louvain many sophists came,
In their curst nets to take them,
By him are gathered to the game:
The Spirit fools doth make them—
They could get nothing by it.

- 4 Oh! they sang sweet, and they sang sour,
Oh! they tried every double;
The boys they stood firm as a tower,
And mocked the sophists' trouble.
The ancient foe it filled with hate
That he was thus defeated
By two such youngsters—he, so great!
His wrath grew sevenfold heated,
He laid his plans to burn them.
- 5 Their cloister-garments off they tore,
Took off their consecrations;
All this the boys were ready for,
They said Amen with patience.
To God their Father they gave thanks
That they would soon be rescued
From Satan's scoffs and mumming pranks,
With which, in falsehood masked,
The world he so befooleth.
- 6 Then gracious God did grant to them
To pass true priesthood's border,
And offer up themselves to him,
And enter Christ's own order,
Unto the world to die outright,
With falsehood made a schism,
And come to heaven all pure and white,
To monkery be the besom,
And leave men's toys behind them.
- 7 They wrote for them a paper small,
And made them read it over;
The parts they showed them therein all
Which their belief did cover.
Their greatest fault was saying this:
"In God we should trust solely;
For man is always full of lies,
We should distrust him wholly:"
So they must burn to ashes.

- 8 Two huge great fires they kindled then,
 The boys they carried to them;
 Great wonder seized on every man,
 For with contempt they view them.
 To all with joy they yielded quite,
 With singing and God-praising;
 The sophs had little appetite
 For these new things so dazing.
 Which God was thus revealing.
- 9* *They now repent the deed of blame,
 Would gladly gloze it over;
 They dare not glory in their shame,
 The facts almost they cover.
 In their hearts gnaweth infamy—
 They to their friends deplore it;
 The Spirit cannot silent be:
 Good Abel's blood out-pouréd
 Must still besmear Cain's forehead.*
- 10* *Leave off their ashes never will;
 Into all lands they scatter;
 Stream, hole, ditch, grave—nought keeps them still
 With shame the foe they spatter.
 Those whom in life with bloody hand
 He drove to silence triple,
 When dead, he them in every land,
 In tongues of every people,
 Must hear go gladly singing.*
- 11 But yet their lies they will not leave,
 To trim and dress the murder;
 The fable false which out they gave,
 Shows conscience grinds them further.
 God's holy ones, e'en after death,
 They still go on belying;
 They say that with their latest breath,
 The boys, in act of dying,
 Repented and recanted.

- 12 Let them lie on for evermore—
 No refuge is so reared;
 For us, we thank our God therefore
 His word has reappeared.
 Even at the door is summer nigh,
 The winter now is ended,
 The tender flowers come out and spy;
 His hand when once extended
 Withdraws not till he's finished.

*Vv. 9–10 appear as the final verses in *WA* 35:414–5. It is likely these verses were composed after the initial publication of the hymn text, as they first appear in the 1524 Wittenberg hymnal. For possible explanations, see *LW* 53:21–3.

Flung to the Heedless Winds (ELH 556)

M. Luther, 1523

Tr. J. A. Messenger, 1843

- 1 Flung to the heedless winds
 Or on the waters cast,
 The martyrs' ashes, watched,
 Shall gathered be at last.
 And from that scattered dust,
 Around us and abroad,
 Shall spring a plenteous seed
 Of witnesses for God.
- 2 The Father hath received
 Their latest living breath,
 And vain is Satan's boast
 Of vict'ry in their death.
 Still, still, though dead, they speak,
 And, trumpet-tongued, proclaim
 To many a wak'ning land
 The one availing name.

Fear All Around: Prophecy and Lament in Jeremiah 20

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THE FAITHFUL PROPHET SPEAKS A DIFFICULT Word, for which he is persecuted, humiliated, and hated. In the face of his tormentors and those who reject his Lord's message he remains firm and strong. But when he has a moment alone with God, he breaks down, complains, laments, and protests with bitter tears and some of the hardest words in Scripture.

Lament must necessarily have a place in our lives as Christians. Our situation is a conflicted reality in which “we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23).¹ To reject lament is to reject the idea that anything is wrong with our world—therefore adopting a stoicism that believes, for example, as Yoda teaches, “Death is a natural part of life.”² There is no room for lament in such a creed; only rejoicing, forcing a false view of the world, whitewashing the tombs, stuffing down hard feelings.

¹ Apart from Jeremiah 20 and unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version.

² *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*, directed by George Lucas (Los Angeles: Lucasfilm, 2005), DVD.

Even “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Yes, he knew his friend Lazarus would rise, but at that moment, Lazarus was dead in a tomb, and weeping became necessary because that was *not good*. We can weep, too.

The prophet Jeremiah is well-known for his lamenting, especially seen in his book under the title of Lamentations, comprising five songs of deep and full, A-to-Z lament. But he laments also in many places throughout the larger book that bears his name. In the larger section of chapter 20 we read a lament of such deep feeling and anguish that some of our sensibilities make us want to turn away our faces in shame. But this “is a remarkable passage, in some ways the central point of the entire book.”³ Here one who is faithful, like “A fortified city and an iron pillar, And bronze walls against the whole land” before men (Jer. 1:18), has the space to release the true feelings of his heart, the difficulties and anguish and despair, and be heard.

Jeremiah and Pashhur

There is context to this chapter. The first verse introduces the reader to a new character in the narrative of Jeremiah’s prophecies, namely “Pashhur ben-Immer, the priest (and he was overseeing commander in the house of YHWH),” but the last word of this verse (הַאֲלֹהִים) requires the antecedent of the previous chapter.

Jeremiah preached a sermon with an object illustration in chapter 19. At God’s direction, the prophet had taken an earthen pot out “to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the Potsherd Gate” (Jer. 19:2). There, before several elders and priests of the people, he declared that, because of the apostasy and idolatry of Judah, their murder and child-sacrifice,

this place shall no more be called Tophet or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hands of those who seek their lives; their corpses I will give as meat for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. I will make this city desolate and a hissing; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its plagues. And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his friend in the siege and in the desperation

³ Michael Wilcock, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 103–4.

with which their enemies and those who seek their lives shall drive them to despair. (Jer. 19:6–9)

As a sign, Jeremiah took the pot he had brought along and broke it. This pot represented the people and the city, which God would break beyond repair.

After this little sermon outside the gates, Jeremiah returned to the court of the Temple and preached the same thing to a larger crowd.

It is after this second telling that Pashhur comes on the scene. Did Pashhur hear the sermon himself (either the first or the second telling), or did he hear a report of it? In other words, is it that “Pashhur ... heard Jeremiah prophesy these words,” or “Pashhur ... heard *that* Jeremiah prophesied these words”? The verb פָּקַד is a Niphal participle. The idea of a report coming to Pashhur is not absolutely excluded from this verb form, however the sense is far simpler if Pashhur heard the sermon personally. After all, because he was “overseeing commander in the house of YHWH,” one would expect this individual to be present at the second telling at least, when Jeremiah was “in the court of the Lord’s house” (19:14).

Pashhur ben-Immer is mentioned nowhere else in Jeremiah or the rest of Scripture. Others named Pashhur are found (even as near as 21:1), but they cannot be the same individual. The patronymic “Immer” marks our Pashhur as a Levite and priest of the sixteenth lot as the schedule was divided by David (1 Chron. 24:14). Just what “overseeing commander in the house of YHWH” means, though, is another matter. פָּקִיד means “overseer,” a term used to describe Jeremiah in his work for the nations in 1:10; and נָגִיד means “leader,” so that here we have a double title without precise parallel elsewhere. The result is a question: “whether Pashhur filled two offices, or whether a single official was called ‘chief overseer,’ or whether the two terms are interchangeable, is uncertain. What is clear from his action is that he functioned to keep order in the temple area in a way like that of the beadle in an English church.”⁴

Pashhur is raised up in this text as a man of great authority and power so that in the confrontation that follows between him and Jeremiah, “There is intense irony in that the overseer in God’s temple is now about to take action against God’s overseer.”⁵ Further, he comes to represent the depth of corruption in the nation of Judah. The Temple,

⁴ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 542.

⁵ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 454.

the house of YHWH—“this house which is called by My name” has indeed “become a den of thieves” (Jer. 7:11). Pashhur stands as a living depiction of this rebellion. So Jeremiah is the mouthpiece of the Lord, and Pashhur is the mouthpiece of stubborn hearts.

In the capacity of his office, “Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and he put him in the stocks which were in the gate of Benjamin, the high one, which is in the house of YHWH.” Such action is commended and even commanded by God for the overseers in the Temple against “every man who is demented and considers himself a prophet, that [they] should put him in prison and in the stocks” (Jer. 29:26). But there is a difference between one “who is demented and considers himself a prophet” and one who actually *is* a prophet. Here in 20:2 is the first place that we have this title given: יְרֵמְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיאַ. It is therefore clear that Pashhur’s actions are wrong—not only a case of mistaken identity, but deliberate attempt to silence the spokesman of the Lord.

This persecution consisted of essentially two steps: first Pashhur “beat” Jeremiah—יִכָּה is a third-person, masculine, singular, Hiphil, imperfect, ו-consecutive form of the verb נָכַח—a broad term for smiting, striking, and killing, used over 500 times in the Old Testament. The Hiphil (causative) form probably indicates that Pashhur didn’t use his own hands but rather commanded others to perform the beating. How many times Jeremiah was struck is not indicated. Again, usage in the Hiphil might indicate that this was a disciplinary beating of multiple blows, rather than merely one strike. Even more, this same verb is used in Deuteronomy 25:3 to describe the limitation to “a certain number of blows” for punishments (Deut. 25:2): “Forty blows [יִכְּנוּ] he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight” (Deut. 25:3).

Second, Pashhur “put him in the stocks.” What exactly these מַהֲפֻכָּת looked like is debatable. They were probably at least somewhat similar to the stocks used in medieval Europe—a wooden structure holding parts of the body in place for the purpose of publicly displaying the criminal and keeping him in place. C. F. Keil suggests that this device, derived from the verb הִפְּךָ—“twisting, was an instrument of torture by which the body was forced into a distorted, unnatural posture; the culprit’s hands and feet were presumably bound, so as to keep the position so.”⁶ Whatever the specific design, Jeremiah was kept in these

⁶ C. F. Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, trans. by David Patrick and James Kennedy (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 194.

stocks overnight “in the gate of Benjamin, the high one, which is in the house of YHWH.” Pashhur’s purpose was to humiliate Jeremiah, putting him on display for people to see. This location was “a wide gate most frequently used by the people, leading from the Temple court upward toward the city.... At this gate the prophet was exposed to the sneers and curses of the people, who hated this prophet of doom.”⁷

It is difficult to deny the similarity to the picture of the sufferer in Psalm 22, e.g.:

All those who see Me ridicule Me;
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,
“He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him;
Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” (Ps. 22:7–8)

In other places Jeremiah is not shy of quoting the Psalms in his prophecies and complaints (cf. Jer. 15:17 and Jer. 17:5–8 to Ps. 1), so it is not outside the realm of possibility that Psalm 22 could have been on his mind during this agonizing night. But we can of course see a potentially even more significant parallel, insofar as Psalm 22 is undoubtedly a prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus.

In being beaten by the Temple authorities and painfully bound to a piece of wood so as to be put on humiliating display for the people as a criminal, while nevertheless being innocent and even a righteous preacher of truth, Jeremiah is a type of Christ. Jesus declared: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!” (Luke 13:34). The history of sinful humanity’s treatment of the Truth is the history of sinful humanity’s treatment of God. Jeremiah was God’s mouthpiece, and was persecuted for that role. Jesus would ultimately take Jeremiah’s place and be killed in it.

But the day dawns after this night of torture. The cross is not left alone, but leads on to resurrection. Daniel is not left in the lions’ den, but comes out victorious. So is the situation of Jeremiah: “And the following day came, and Pashhur sent Jeremiah from the stocks.” The text emphasizes the day that came by adding the adverbial *מִמָּחֳרָת* after the narrative marker *וַיְהִי*, because something significant would come after this period of imprisonment. However, Jeremiah’s freedom was not perhaps Pashhur’s main aim. The Hiphil verb *יֵצֵא* literally means “to cause to go out,” and can be used in the sense of “to lead” or “bring out.” If Pashhur had simply set Jeremiah free, the preferred verb may have

⁷ Theo. Laetsch, *Bible Commentary: Jeremiah* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 175.

been the Pual form of **הִפֵּשׂ** (cf. Lev. 19:20). Therefore the verb used in this verse might be interpreted in a few ways: Was Pashhur leading Jeremiah out to put him on display, to continue his humiliation among the crowd? Was he sending him away in the early hours of the morning, before anyone could come and object to the unjust imprisonment of God's prophet? Or was he simply sending the prophet away, with the command we might imagine, similar to the Sanhedrin who sent the apostles out and "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18).

Because there is no indication that any imprisonment of Jeremiah's continued, the first possibility is unlikely. Because there does not seem to be much vocal support for Jeremiah in Jerusalem, the idea that Pashhur was avoiding causing offense to anyone is equally unlikely. But I think there is an indication that Pashhur was *sending Jeremiah away* rather than simply *releasing him*, with the command to preach no longer. This would fall under the purview of Pashhur's office in the Temple court system. But with boldness, authority, and strength, Jeremiah responded to Pashhur with a renaming: "YHWH does not call your name Pashhur, for it is Magor-Missabib."

This Hebrew phrase was a sort of slogan for Jeremiah's preaching. He uttered it three other times in his prophecies as a warning (Jer. 6:25, 46:5, 49:29) and once in his Lamentations (2:22). The phrase is also found in Psalm 31:13, which is attributed to King David. And we will hear more on this phrase when we come to Jeremiah's complaint, especially in v. 10. In any case, the phrase is a common one for Jeremiah, so much so that we might think of him like those doomsday preachers sometimes seen on city streets with cardboard signs pronouncing, "The End is Nigh!"—Jeremiah's sign might read, "מָגוֹר מִסָּבִיב".

Because this was likely a common phrase in Jeremiah's preaching, when Pashhur sent him away (perhaps with the command to stop preaching), Jeremiah turned the condemnation on his persecutor. It has been suggested that a play on words is involved in Pashhur's renaming. Keil summarizes:

[The name Pashhur] is supposed to be composed of **פּוֹשׁ**, Chald. *augeri*, and **הוֹר**, *nobilitas*, with the force: *abundantia claritatis* (Rashi); or after Arab. *fs'*, *gloriatu est de nobilitate* (Simonis); or from Arab. *hsh* *amplus fuit locus*, and the Chald. **סְחוֹר**, *circumcirca: de*

securitate circumcirca; or finally, by Ew., from פָּשׁ from פּוֹשׁ, spring, leap, rejoice (Mal. 3:20), and חוּד = חוּל, joy round about.⁸

On the other hand, another possibility is offered by J. A. Thompson: “The first three consonants of this name, *pšh*, may provide a clue since this root is used in Aram. ... and in Heb. In the sense of ‘tear off,’ ‘strip away’.... If we postulate an original expression *paššāh sehôr*, ‘destruction all about,’ which became abbreviated to *pašhûr*, we have a possible explanation of Jeremiah’s pun.”⁹

A rather persuasive argument comes from William Holladay: “It is clear...from the existence of מְסָבִיב ‘on every side’ in the new name, that the Aramaic סְחוּר ‘surrounding’ is part of Jrm’s deformation of ‘Pashhur’.... Jrm’s play on the first part of Pashhur’s name must likewise be Aramaic. The obvious solution is פָּשׁ, participle of פּוֹשׁ ‘be fruitful.’”¹⁰

Still, not merely because there is so much uncertainty about what pun could possibly be on Jeremiah’s mind, Keil’s conclusion is probably best: “All these interpretations are arbitrary.”¹¹ Holladay’s hypothesis is most convincing because he points out the prevalence of Aramaic as *lingua franca* in Jeremiah’s day. Nevertheless, the existence of a pun is not strictly necessary. Jeremiah was pronouncing God’s judgment on Pashhur for his persecution of the Word of God in the person of the prophet, in which judgment Pashhur was given a new name (cf. Peter, whose new name has no relation to his original name of Simon; or Israel vs. Jacob).¹²

Part of what convinces Holladay that a pun is on Jeremiah’s mind in the name change is his view of the chronology of Jeremiah’s preaching: taking note of the multiple instances of the phrase “מְגוּר מְסָבִיב” he says that “all of these passages (with the possible exception of Ps 31:14) are dependent upon the present one,”¹³ that is, in 20:3. In other words, Holladay believes that the moment Jeremiah turned on Pashhur and pronounced his name-change is the first time he uttered his “מְגוּר מְסָבִיב” slogan (except, *possibly*, when reciting Psalm 31, which might

⁸ Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 194.

⁹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 455 n35.

¹⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 543–4.

¹¹ Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 194.

¹² A similar renaming occurs in Jer. 19:6, where the Valley of the Son of Hinnom is called the Valley of Slaughter. This was foretold in Jer. 7:32. In his commentary on that verse, Holladay performs some concentrated gymnastic exercises to propose yet another pun on Jeremiah’s mind (Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 269). So much effort for something as easily explained as a new name being given is unnecessary.

¹³ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 543.

have served as inspiration for the pun, according to Holladay). Since the book of Jeremiah is not chronologically laid out, this argument is possible, but again, not necessary.¹⁴

In any event, Jeremiah explains Pashhur's new name:

For thus says YHWH: "Behold, I am giving you to terror for you and for all your friends, and they will fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes will see; and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will lead them into exile in Babylon and he will kill them with the sword. And I will give all the riches of this city and all her labor and all her honor and all the treasures of the kings of Judah—I will give them into the hand of their enemies, and they will plunder them and seize them and bring them to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, will go among the captives; and you will go to Babylon, and there you will die, and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied in the lie."

A heavy curse.

This layered curse cycles around the verb "נתן"—"give." It occurs four times in these verses, beginning with the participle נֹתֵן, including the second-person, masculine, singular suffix, referring to Pashhur. נתן is a highly versatile verb, and can even carry the sense of "make." So in v. 4 God is "making [Pashhur] into a terror" for himself and his friends. However, something more may be understood by hearing "giving" instead.¹⁵ Consider how God has punished others who "exchanged the truth of God for the lie" (Rom. 1:25): "God also gave them up [pare,dwken] to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves" (Rom. 1:24); "God gave them up [pare,dwken] to vile passions" (Rom. 1:26); "God gave them over [pare,dwken] to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Rom. 1:28). Similarly, St. Paul describes some who, "concerning

¹⁴ E.g., Dr. Theo. Laetsch sets chapter 6, in which the first utterance of bybi'S'mi rAgm' is found in the book of Jeremiah, during the reign of King Josiah, and chapter 20 after it, in the year of Josiah's death. (*Jeremiah*, 8). We will avoid too much speculation on chronology here. Instead, we agree with the "conviction" of Michael Wilcock, "that the order in which we read [Jeremiah's] book today is not, as many hold, the result of much rearranging after his time by anonymous editors, but the order in which he actually meant us to read it" (*Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 11).

¹⁵ N.B. LXX translates into "di,dwmi" and its future-tense form "dw,sw", which carries similar shades of meaning.

the faith have suffered shipwreck...whom I delivered [pare,dwka] to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:20).¹⁶

In the punishments of Jer. 20:4–6, therefore, it may be understood that God is giving Pashhur and his friends into the hands of others who will serve to punish them—namely Babylon, but also Pashhur himself. This man would be the picture of Psalm 7:

Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity;
 Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood.
 He made a pit and dug it out,
 And has fallen into the ditch which he made.
 His trouble shall return upon his own head,
 And his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.
 (Ps. 7:14–16)

God names him “מָגוֹר מְסָבִיב” because he is giving him to “מָגוֹר”, “terror” or “fear.”

A few remarks are appropriate here on that word alone: the noun is derived from the verb root גָּוַר—“to sojourn.” Hence a more literal translation of the noun would be “sojourning place,” as indeed the term is better translated in Psalm 55:15, among other places. The etymology is troublesome. Holladay suggests that Jeremiah is intending to create a layered understanding of this word, as indicated by the second word in the new name, “מְסָבִיב”—“all around”: “it is not only spatial, ‘on every side,’ but notional, ‘from every point of view’—‘מָגַר with every nuance.’”¹⁷ This deserves exploration throughout the curse Jeremiah utters.

The מָגוֹר which would take over Pashhur would first include the death of his friends: “they will fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes will see.” Pashhur’s punishment would be like King Zedekiah’s: “Then they [the Babylonians] killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon” (2 Kings 25:7). This punishment of the wicked king would intentionally leave the death of his sons in his memory as his last sight, which he would thereafter remember as being caused by his own wicked actions. With the prophecy of Jeremiah, Pashhur would also recognize the same after all the fear came upon him. Like King Oedipus of myth, both of these historical figures might say, “What was

¹⁶ It is to be understood that παραδίδωμι and δίδωμι are different words, but the overlap in their senses should also be acknowledged.

¹⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 544.

there for me to look at, to speak to, to love? What joyful word can I expect to hear, my friends? Take me away, out of this country, quickly, take me away. I am lost, accursed, and hated by the gods beyond all other men.”¹⁸

The exile which Oedipus took as mercy, however, would be further punishment for Pashhur, as it was for Zedekiah: All Judah would go into exile, “all the riches of this city [Jerusalem] and all her labor and all her honor and all the treasures of the kings of Judah” would go, too, and Pashhur himself would go into exile along with his whole household. He would die in Babylon, and would not even be granted a burial in Judah.

As for the identity of Pashhur’s “friends” (אַהֲבָיִם), nothing specific is given. One might assume that Jeremiah means all those who are in Pashhur’s “camp,” others who are like him and reject God’s Word. But I suggest a slightly broader understanding: Not only those *like Pashhur* would experience this judgment of God upon Jerusalem. Rather the *whole city* and indeed the *whole nation of Judah* would experience it. That Pashhur would see the death of his friends at the sword of their enemies is not only the execution of political opponents, but a personal punishment of Pashhur himself: i.e., all *those whom he loved* (cf. the root אָהַב) would be killed.

This is emphasized by how the punishments go on. From this personal punishment, the indictment broadens: in v. 5 God declares that he will give “all the riches [חֶסֶן] of this city and all her labor [יְגִיעָה] and all her honor [יְקָרָה] and all the treasures [אוֹצְרוֹת] of the kings of Judah ... into the hands of their enemies.” Even here, however, in the broadness of the punishment, Pashhur would feel it. All these precious external things were central to Pashhur’s idolatry. Like some in Jerusalem in the New Testament, Pashhur would be one who “spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations,” to whom, like Jeremiah, Jesus said, “These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Luke 21:5, 6).

The punishments come back again to Pashhur himself in v. 6, with the 1-consecutive followed by the second-person pronoun: וְאַתָּה—“And you.” The punishments follow this progression, therefore, as Jeremiah first shakes his slogan-bearing warning sign at Pashhur: “You’ll see your friends killed”; then he sweeps the condemning hand over the Temple

¹⁸ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. by Bernard Knox (New York: Pocket Books, 2005), 75.

and the city and says, “You’ll see all this plundered and destroyed”; and finally he thrusts back to Pashhur himself: “And as for you yourself....”

Pashhur and his household would not die in the attack. They would go as captives, like Daniel and his friends. But whereas Daniel would be exalted by God as being among the remnant, and as being “distinguished ... because an excellent spirit was in him” (Dan. 6:3), Pashhur would fade into obscurity: in Babylon he would die, and there he would be buried. This simple end is what Jesus told about the Rich Man, counter to Lazarus: “The rich man also died and was buried” (Luke 16:22). Of course, what came after must also loom: “being in torments in Hades” (Luke 16:23). Pashhur did not know the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, but he had heard the warnings from the Torah about disobedience to God and the punishment for it:

[Y]ou will...be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men’s hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut. 4:26-29)

Since nothing more is said in Scripture about this person, all that we can say further is speculation. And yet, it seems as though Pashhur would *not* turn and seek God in the way described in Deuteronomy. Who knows, but perhaps in Babylon in the years to come, when King Nebuchadnezzar set up his image of gold and commanded the music of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, and when “all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up” (Dan. 3:7), Pashhur’s head might have been bowing along with the crowd. In any case, this much is certain: Pashhur would experience terror in every sense.

But there is one final remark to be made in connection with the punishments of Pashhur: it seems that not *all* of his friends would die in Jerusalem, but some would suffer the same fate as Pashhur in being brought captive to Babylon, where they would die and be buried: “all your friends [אֶהְיֶה] to whom you have prophesied [נְבִיאִי] in the lie [בְּשִׁקְרָה].” It is interesting that here Pashhur is credited with the work of a prophet, albeit a false one. On one hand, this puts him once more into sharp distinction against Jeremiah: “Pashhur had ‘prophesied falsely’ (20:6), whereas to Jeremiah Yahweh had said, ‘I have put my

words in your mouth' (1:9)!"¹⁹ And yet it's also not merely that Pashhur had prophesied "falsely," which is certainly an acceptable translation of "בִּשְׁקָר" (in the lie). I prefer the more literalistic rendering of "in the lie," as it is nearly translated by NKJV in 23:14–17:

Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem:
 They commit adultery and walk in lies [בִּשְׁקָר];
 They also strengthen the hands of evildoers,
 So that no one turns back from his wickedness....
 Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you.
 They make you worthless;
 They speak a vision of their own heart,
 Not from the mouth of the LORD.
 They continually say to those who despise Me,
 "The LORD has said, 'You shall have peace';"
 And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own
 heart, they say,
 "No evil shall come upon you."

Jeremiah is deliberately sent by God to be the prophet of Truth vs. all the prophecy of *the* lie—the same lie which the Serpent spoke to Eve—namely the lie of self-idolatry, idolatry that believes that one can walk "according to the dictates of his own heart" and yet have peace.

Jeremiah's position as truth-speaker makes things all the more dark and bitter when Jeremiah finds himself alone with God.

Jeremiah and God

The text shifts abruptly into poetry with v. 7, which continues to the end of the chapter. Such a stylistic change is not uncommon to Jeremiah, so there is no reason to suppose that the poem of vv. 7–18 is far contextually divorced from the earlier part of the chapter.²⁰ If we assume, again, that this book is structured deliberately—by God if not by Jeremiah or Baruch—even *if* he had originally composed this complaint at some other time, it is reflective of something true in connection with his encounter with Pashhur. One might object to the abrupt shift between vv. 6 and 7, from bold confessor and prophet to complainer—but such an impulse is merely a symptom of "our malady in the Western churches, an addiction to Stoicism in preference to the

¹⁹ Wilcock, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 102.

²⁰ Cf. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 551.

clear word of God.”²¹ It is true that God had commanded Jeremiah, “Do not be dismayed before their faces, Lest I dismay you before them” (Jer. 1:17). But this does not forbid Jeremiah from feeling dismay *outside the public sphere*. He boldly spoke God’s Word to Pashhur, as God commanded him. But now, alone, he can voice his lament.

Thus, although his communion with God was in many respects exemplary, at other times he lashes out even at God, whom he accuses of having tricked him into becoming a prophet (20:7 ff). That is, *although his public utterances betray no sign of it*, his laments reveal an inward blanching at the possibility that his call and inspiration were false.²²

I believe this resistance to the depth and complexity of true lament is responsible for several unfortunate interpretations of this poetic complaint of Jeremiah’s, and we will touch on a few.

Imagine Jeremiah, after pronouncing the bold and harsh judgment of God upon Pashhur in vv. 3–6, leaving the priest speechless or laughing, running to a safe and solitary place, closing the door behind himself or crouching in the shade of a tree, there to let the “fortified city and . . . iron pillar” façade slip away (Jer. 1:18). God’s promise endured for Jeremiah. No one was able to hurt him. Even after his humiliating night in the stocks, after being beaten and condemned, he has been able to proclaim God’s Word. But now he is only before his God. Now he is vulnerable.

The ESV renders v. 7a as, “O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived.” Such a translation naturally makes the pious flinch, because “God . . . cannot lie” (Tit. 1:2), and because Jesus calls himself “the truth” (John 14:6) and says that God’s “word is truth” (John 17:17). Can God deceive?

William Holladay looks at Exodus 22:16 to understand the meaning of פִּתְיָה, where it refers to seduction, and he interprets: “Jeremiah is saying, I had thought that our relationship was best likened to a marriage bond (15:16, by implication)—but no, I was fooled, enticed, tricked by you; you had your fling with me and then tossed me aside.”²³ In another place he explains more: “Jrm questions the effective-

²¹ Gregory P. Schulz, “Our Lamentable Lacuna,” *LOGIA* 28; no. 1 (Epiphany 2019): 7.

²² Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 232. Emphasis added.

²³ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah: Spokesman out of Time* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1974), 101.

ness of Yahweh's word and accuses Yahweh of misleading him (compare the 'deceitful brook,' 15:18)... Yahweh is accused of having broken the relationship which he had initiated with Jrm. The choice of the nip'al stem rather than the pu'al for the second occurrence of the verb may suggest more 'I let myself be deceived' than simply 'I was deceived.'"²⁴

Origen contemplates a different example, that of parents and children: "we do not speak to them [children] as we do to mature people, but we speak to them as children who need training, and we deceive children when we frighten children in order that it may halt the lack of education in youth." And from this example he concludes:

We are all children to God, and we need the discipline of children. Because of this, God, since he cares about us, deceives us, even if we do not perceive the deceit beforehand, lest as those who have gone beyond the infant we may no longer be trained through deceit but through acts. In one way the child is led into fear, in another way into progressing in age and crossing beyond the age of childhood.²⁵

But perhaps we don't need to wrestle with the idea that God could lie at all, and instead "Jeremiah's flesh is speaking here, chafing under the constant opposition and derision of God's Law and curse."²⁶ Perhaps "these words were not spoken through the prophetic Spirit, but ... Jeremiah ... uttered them inconsiderately through the influence of a hasty impulse."²⁷

Admitting simply the syntactic category of seduction, some, like Henry Cowles, resist any hint of the sense of deception and believe, "The true meaning is, 'Thou didst *persuade me*,' i.e. to undertake the prophetic work, quite against my wish and preference, but I yielded."²⁸ But I believe this shies away from the real depth of Jeremiah's feeling. Leave aside first the question of whether or God *can* lie or deceive: the prophet *feels* duped, gulled, tricked. We can speculate about what might be the cause of such a feeling, but the truth is, he lets it out here.

There are other terms for lies and deceit used in Scripture. In Gen. 3:13, Eve accuses the serpent of "deceiving" her (הַשִּׂיאָנִי—root: שׂוא).

²⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 552.

²⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 19.15.3-5, quoted in Dean O. Wenhe, ed., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, ACCS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 153-154.

²⁶ Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 176.

²⁷ John Calvin, quoted in Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 552. N.B. this is not Calvin's own view, but his summary of some other interpreters.

²⁸ Henry Cowles, *Jeremiah, and His Lamentations* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1869), 165.

In Zeph. 3:13, Zephaniah prophesies a time when Israel would speak no “lies” (כָּזַב—root: כֹּזֵב), and in their mouth would be no “deceitful” tongue (תַּרְמִית—root: רָמָה). These words all carry specific negative connotations: שׂוֹא is related to emptiness, vanity, and worthlessness. כֹּזֵב is a broader term for lying, with related concepts of failure. And רָמָה deals with treachery. פָּתָה, the verb we have here, has connotations of simplicity, gullibility, open-mindedness, and seduction. It might be said therefore that Jeremiah is saying more about himself than about God—he, the prophet, was so gullible as to accept what God was offering him.

The same root (פָּתָה) is used in 1 Kings 22, where the prophet Micaiah relates what occurred in the heavenly throne room, in God’s counsel, when he had determined to bring about King Ahab’s fall. God asked the spirits before him, “Who will persuade [יִפְתָּה] Ahab...?” (1 Kings 22:20). The spirit who volunteers calls himself a “lying spirit [רוּחַ שֶׁקֶר]” (1 Kings 22:22). Yet another word for “lying” is introduced in this account (root: שֶׁקֶר), which seems to be a broad synonym for all the words previously used: fraud, wrong, deception, and disappointment are all connected concepts.

Therefore it would not be incorrect to connect the idea of deception to פָּתָה as it occurs in Jer. 20:7. The passage from 1 Kings further complicates the matter of whether or not God can lie. But Origen’s point can be well taken: “the deceit from God is one thing, the deceit from the Serpent another.”²⁹ Just what sort of “thing” God’s deceit might be, Origen (wisely, I think) does not define. He rather notices the outcomes: “But the deceit that happened to the prophet ... brought him to a very great grace of prophecy, by increasing him in power, by bringing him maturity and by being able to serve the will of the word of God without fearing people.”³⁰

But we might equally be disturbed to attribute Machiavellian methods to God. No, God performs his actions morally all along the way—although we can also acknowledge that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1 Cor. 1:25). I propose this understanding of things:³¹

²⁹ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.3.4-5, quoted in Wenthe, ed., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 155.

³⁰ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.3.4-5, quoted in Wenthe, ed., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 155.

³¹ Noting that we also don’t know to what Jeremiah refers when he says God “gulled” him, most interpreters believe it has something to do with his call. Partly for lack of any convincing alternative we will not differ.

Jeremiah was told by God, “They will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you” (Jer. 1:19). When he spent his night in the stocks, humiliated and beaten by Pashhur, did it seem to Jeremiah as though “they” had prevailed? Certainly, he turned and pronounced a strong curse and word from God immediately after, but this does not mean that he wasn’t uncertain in his soul. Instead, “though Jeremiah has given himself heart and soul to bringing these truths home to the rebellious nation, none of his warnings registers, *because none of his threats has come true*. Hence his emotional crisis. Yahweh has deceived him and Judah derides him.”³² This would seem a failure. Our cardboard-sign-bearing doomsday herald might seem strong in his convictions to all who see him, but when the audience is gone, when the night falls, when he is alone with God, does he anxiously cry out, “How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?” (Ps. 13:1)?

Take a step back and look at the larger picture of the book of Jeremiah, and we notice that from chapter 11 until now, Jeremiah’s prophecies have been interspersed with his confessions to God (which Wilcock prefers to call his “protests”³³). Going in sequence along these complaints, “it would appear that Jeremiah’s musings are not in a direction of growing security in God.”³⁴ His complaint in chapter 20 is the lowest place we find him. This “final protest is a remarkable passage, in some ways the central point of the entire book.”³⁵ The picture is of a prophet who has wrestled with his God again and again, over the message he was told to proclaim and over the people to whom he was told to tell the message. Now is the last straw. With the persecution of Pashhur, Jeremiah has hit a breaking point.

From the first moments of his call, Jeremiah had tried to get out of it: like Moses he said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak” (Jer. 1:6). But God persuaded him, and prevailed. The Lord had been honest with the young man about the trials he would face (cf. 1:18), but he had also promised to be with him through these trials. Jeremiah had been convinced that, with God, he would be able to carry out his prophetic work. But after his night in the Benjamin Gate, to his aching bones, this no longer seemed possible. He protests that his well is empty, but God is demanding that he draw more water from it.

A parallel phrase continues: “You are stronger than I and you prevail.” One could allow this to become more picturesque of the seduction

³² Wilcock, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 106–7. Emphasis original.

³³ Wilcock, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 71.

³⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah: Spokesman out of Time*, 100.

³⁵ Wilcock, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 103–4.

warned against in Ex. 22:16, and in the depths of Jeremiah's darkness, it would be consistent. God led Jeremiah away into his prophetic work, and God won. Jeremiah, basically, accuses God of bullying him into this prophetic work. He had said he wasn't fit for it, and now he feels that's proven. Of course, God will still keep his promise, upholding Jeremiah in his work for years to come. But for the time being, Jeremiah feels like he wants out, and God won't let him. This is unfair (Jeremiah feels), and he wants God to know how cruelly he has treated his prophet.

And Jeremiah states the reason he feels this way: "I am for laughter all the day; everyone mocks me." Repeating forms of the root כלל here ("all" and "everyone"), Jeremiah can only see enemies around him, only "the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). Their faces are laughing (שחוק). שחק is a similar root to צחק—perhaps with only a dialectical difference, or a shift over time, the latter being the root of the name "Isaac" and used more frequently in the Torah, whereas the former is more familiar among the prophets. But this is no humorous laughter. It is malicious, demonstrable because they mock (לעג). This same word is voiced by the Psalmist, again in Ps. 22: "All those who see Me ridicule [יִלְעִיגוּ] Me" (Ps. 22:7). Because of God, both Jeremiah and the Psalmist (and Jesus Christ himself) are mocked by the very ones they seek to save.

But even in the act of seeking to save, Jeremiah is perhaps not going about it the way he would desire. He complains, "For as often as I speak I lament; 'Oppression and violence!' I cry." "מְדַי" is an idiom, literally "from the sufficiency of," which means, "as often as." Jeremiah means that each word he speaks comes out either *as* lament or *with* lament. Added to this is his cry of "Oppression and violence!" How exactly the semantics of this verse is to be structured is a matter of debate,³⁶ however the basic point is clarified as it goes on and the prophet says, "For the Word of YHWH became to me a reproach and a mockery all the day." That is, the Word of God and Jeremiah's connection to it cause him great distress in the public sphere.

³⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 553: "The syntax of these verses ... is not self-evident." Cf. Michael Fishbane, "A Wretched Thing of Shame, A Mere Belly': An Interpretation of Jeremiah 20:7–12," in *The Biblical Mosaic: Changing Perspectives*, ed. by Robert Polzin and Eugene Rothman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 174–175: "For when Jeremiah cries 'violence and plunder' it is unclear whether he is exposing the injustice of his fellowmen, or whether he is reacting to the violence done to him as a result of his speaking and shouting. ... In sum, the network of syntactic ambiguities in v 8 is truly complex; but it does not seem necessary to affirm one resolution at the expense of any other. Indeed, such rich ambiguity suggests simultaneous levels of protest and distress raging within Jeremiah—each one struggling for life expression."

The words here are different from those found in v. 7: “חַרְפָּה” — “reproach”—is the substantive of “חָרַף,” which is the speaking of “sharp things” against someone, usually referring to the word of reproach spoken; and “קָלַס” is a noun derived from “קָלַס”—“to mock,” usually referring to the object of mockery, i.e. the person or thing being mocked. The object of these words in this verse are “דְּבַר יְהוָה,” and therefore they can be synonymous with one another. That is, the Word of YHWH itself is the reproach for Jeremiah, and the Word of YHWH is also the object of mockery for him. We should understand the metonymy employed here: because Jeremiah speaks the Word of God aloud, the people of Judah reproach *him* and *he* becomes an object of mockery. But again, in the poetic ambiguity of this verse, the prophet also directs his own reproaches against that very Word and God himself:

Jeremiah confesses to God his own inner monologue. He says, “לֹא-אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ” —is the verb cohortative, “Let me not remember him,” or imperfect indicative, “I will not remember him”? Either way, the basic meaning will not change. Jeremiah intended to shut his ears to the Word of God, and to close his mouth to it. But his efforts failed: “And in my heart it was like a burning fire shut up in my bones. And I grew weary of restraining it, and I could not.” There is a question of antecedent in this verse, namely, to what “it” refers. The pronoun is unspoken in the Hebrew, but must be understood, especially in the first instance as the subject of “וְהִיא.” Is it the Word which became a burning fire in Jeremiah’s heart and bones? Is it the name of God? Should we translate “he” for God himself? Or does “it” refer to the situation in general, causing “וְהִיא” to be more like a marker for the narrative’s continuation, e.g. “And it was”? Again we can embrace the ambiguity and let it mean all of these in the poetic outpouring of Jeremiah’s frustrated spirit.

The frequency and ease with which the characters of Scripture spontaneously break into song and poetry may be used as a criticism of the Bible, an argument that it is composed of myth rather than history.³⁷ Sure, we might be able to elevate our minds to the concept that the Mother of God would sing by inspiration her Magnificat after coming to visit Elizabeth (Luke 1:46–55), but can we assume the same of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1–10)? And certainly it’s silly to think that Adam could spontaneously compose the poem of Genesis 2:23 after meeting his bride! The same perhaps could be said of Jeremiah’s poem here.

³⁷ Cf. Horace D. Hummel’s challenge in *The Word Becoming Flesh* to the objections of historical criticism in reference to the songs from Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32, and 1 Samuel 2, among others (73, 96–97, 124).

There's a strange tension in our understanding of poetry. On the one hand, poet Kim Addonizio claims that "People think it's easy to write [poetry]. They don't realize that it is as difficult to make a great poem as it is to make a great painting or blast out a virtuoso electric guitar solo. . . . It is work."³⁸ On the other hand, there is the infamous story of poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who, while under the "inspiration" of something rather less holy than the Spirit, was composing his poem "Kubla Khan" with rapidity and feeling—until he was interrupted by a knock at the door. When he returned to the page with annoyance, he found the inspiration had left him, and so the poem is subtitled, "A Fragment."

I mention these perspectives only to highlight the question of the humanity found within Jeremiah 20:7–18, and to demonstrate that, in poetry, often the structure is indicative of the theme.³⁹ We could of course skirt the issue entirely by claiming that Mary and Hannah and Adam and Jeremiah were all simply inspired to sing their songs and utter their poems, "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). We must confess that this is true—the Bible is a divine book because it is entirely inspired by God, containing no errors, and efficacious in accomplishing his purposes. But precisely because of its perfection we cannot deny the way God makes use of the structure. And it is also human, because it contains the marks of the individual personalities of each human author God inspired. This tension of divine will and human personality is, in fact, at the core of Jeremiah's troubled spirit.

Michael Fishbane draws on some Greek mythology to understand what makes Jeremiah different:

He knew in his bones that he could not reject his prophetic destiny. But he could not accept it, either. And so, just here, lay Jeremiah's tragic paradox. Like Thamyris of old, Jeremiah was hounded by divine demands. But when Thamyris tried to inhibit his inspiring divine voices, the gods crippled him with a more awesome silence (*Iliad*: 2.594–600). Jeremiah, by contrast, could not for a moment restrain the divine words which consumed him. He felt himself—in

³⁸ Kim Addonizio, *Ordinary Genius* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009), 15.

³⁹ Cf. Psalms 9–10, which are together an imperfect acrostic, getting lost somewhere in the middle, even as the Psalmist finds himself wondering, "Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide in times of trouble?" (10:1), and then can only see the prosperity and heinous behavior of the wicked. But the structure returns when God is invoked to set things right.

the mocking words once spoken by the Muses about their prophetic mediums—a wretched thing of shame, a mere belly.⁴⁰

When Jeremiah therefore says, “And in my heart it was like a burning fire shut up in my bones. And I grew weary of restraining it, and I could not,” he reiterates the point he said in v. 7: “You are stronger than I and you prevail.” “Restraining” is כַּלְפֵּל, the relatively uncommon Pilpel infinitive construct form of כּוּל. By using the Pilpel, which is analogous to the Piel in sense and meaning, Jeremiah emphasized a “rapidly repeated,”⁴¹ almost frantic activity and mentality in his attempt to contain, restrain, and suppress the fire in his bones. Jeremiah was trying to hide this divine light under a basket, but he seems to have made the same error as Nadab and Abihu, thinking God’s fire was just like any old flame (Lev. 10). There is mercy, therefore, that God’s fire did not destroy Jeremiah but confirmed him in his work—more like the coal that touched Isaiah’s lips than the fire that consumed Aaron’s sons. God used this lament and complaint of Jeremiah’s, his Word being locked in his prophet’s bones, to train him and prepare him for what was to come next; and more, perhaps, to use Jeremiah as a picture of suffering and lament, both for the lives of God’s people when *they* would suffer, and for the life of their Savior when *he* would suffer:

Blather as we might, suffering cannot be managed, it cannot be philosophized away by Stoicism, even at Stoicism’s full prescription strength. Suffering assaults us willy-nilly with the reality that our life is radically, horribly, unbearably disordered. This is precisely where lamenting comes in. Or better: this is precisely where God comes into our lives and our consciousness to reorder our very human being by means of his psalms and the Bible’s other books and chapters of lament.⁴²

In fact, it is in Jeremiah’s word “וְלֹא אֹכֵל” (1 s. Hophal fut.)—“and I could not”—that the theology of lament comes to the fore. Here is the

⁴⁰ Fishbane, “A Wretched Thing of Shame, A Mere Belly,” 176. The phrase just quoted, which serves as the title of Fishbane’s essay, comes from the *Theogony* of Hesiod. Thamyris, also, is not totally akin to Jeremiah, in that he was not resisting the work of prophet, but boasted that his own abilities were greater than those of the Muses. He was punished by them into muteness for thinking his abilities were his alone and not theirs to give and take and use for their own purposes. Nevertheless, the point of comparison is the connection between divinity and prophetic mouthpiece.

⁴¹ Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 16.

⁴² Schulz, “Our Lamentable Lacuna,” 14.

admission that *he* is merely the creature, while God has the power. The question of his will seems decided against what he would wish. In fact, he has no free will. He is entirely at the mercy of God. The attitude of Jeremiah is one of faith, because he recognizes God as God, and puts himself completely at his mercy, but he also complains to God about the unfairness of his present circumstances, just as do the psalmists in the Psalms of Complaint:

They tell [God] exactly how they experience his current actions and inactivity toward them. They complain and protest and ask God to be the one he has told the people he is and the one he has revealed in the past. They firmly believe, in total disregard of present evidence, that God is still rich in steadfast love and compassion, that he is still the one who forgives sin, that his promises and covenant are still valid and unchangeable, and that his former actions when he made Israel into his people are still characteristic of the way he deals with his people. They protest God's work of wrath as not being his proper work, and they seek his steadfast love and help that is given for the sake of his steadfast love.⁴³

By his very act of praying Jeremiah is like the complaint psalmists who “turn from the God of their experience to the God of their belief and assume that God does care about their distress, that he will hear their prayers, and that he is rich in steadfast love.”⁴⁴ This must be kept in mind as we continue to hear Jeremiah complain and protest against God.⁴⁵

The way Jeremiah sees God's wrath (or at least uncaring cruelty) at work is through enemies: “For I heard the talk of many: ‘Fear all around [מִגּוֹר מְסָבִיב]! Report, and we will report it.’” The enemies, the many (רְבִים), speak Jeremiah's own slogan, “evidently an expression he used so often that it became a nickname. ‘There goes old Magor-missabib!’”⁴⁶

⁴³ Ingvar Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 175.

⁴⁴ Ingvar Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy*, 158.

⁴⁵ Holladay remarks: “In his complaints to Yahweh [Jeremiah] avails himself of the genre of individual laments; we find in the confessions, then, the same characteristics as are to be found in that genre: addresses to Yahweh, expressions of confidence in him, the details of his complaints—the words of his opponents, Yahweh's neglect of him—and his pleas that Yahweh vindicate him and destroy his opponents. In taking over the genre of the individual lament Jrm has cut that genre loose from its place in the cult. Here, as in so many other ways, Jrm shows himself an innovator in making fresh use of earlier genres” (*Jeremiah 1*, 360).

⁴⁶ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 460.

The phrase is laughable to these enemies, because they are convinced of their peace. As for the second part of their line, “Report, and we will report it,” it “means, denounce him; bring charges against him; we will repeat and indorse them.”⁴⁷ Laetsch, Thompson, Keil, et al. agree. “הִגִּידוּ” is the 3 pl. m. Hiphil imperative of נָגַד. The Qal form means “be conspicuous,” but in Hiphil, “cause to be conspicuous,” it means “declare, tell, make known, publish, report.” Because the verb is plural, one can envision these mockers all around Jeremiah, seeing him pass by in the street, calling out his nickname and then shouting to all who will hear, “Report him! We’ll back you!” He lives in fear of his life—with his recent captivity still clanging around in his mind, Jeremiah is terrified of all the faces around him and the likelihood that they’ll put him back in, possibly experiencing flashbacks to it already. Jeremiah’s persecution is not only physical, not only emotional, but there is a mental toll being taken as well. So another angle on his complaint might be, What possible use could God have for allowing his prophet to suffer from PTSD?

It’s not only the professed enemies of Jeremiah that are the problem, either, but “Every man of my peace is keeping watch for my falling.” This English rendering literally translates “כָּל אֲנֹשׁ שְׁלָמִי” and most likely refers to former friends and allies. Jeremiah employs the more poetic “אֲנֹשׁ” instead of the more common “אָדָם” or even “אִישׁ” (which is more often man as opposed to woman). Is he consciously leaning into the poetic form for this lament, or is “אֲנֹשׁ” more colloquial at his time? Not much more needs to be read into this word choice, but clearly Jeremiah feels his experience is parallel to the Psalmist:

All who hate me whisper together against me;
 Against me they devise my hurt.
 “An evil disease,” they say, “clings to him.
 And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more.”
 Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted,
 Who ate my bread,
 Has lifted up his heel against me. (Ps. 41:7–9)

There is a further question in this line over how “צִלְעִי” should be understood: either “my rib” (צִלְעַ) or “my falling” (צִלְעָ). “Jerome chooses the first option,” reading the phrase as “watching over my side,” and therefore intensifying the picture of these former allies, even deeply

⁴⁷ Cowles, *Jeremiah, and His Lamentations*, 166.

trusted friends.⁴⁸ However, the more straightforward reading would understand “falling,” or “stumbling,” as these friends-turned-enemies are watching and waiting for a slip-up so they can deal the final blow. This is furthered by the last line of v. 10, words put into the mouths of these enemies: “Perhaps he will be gulled, and we will prevail over him; and we will take our revenge on him.”

It doesn't take a particularly astute reader to recognize that “his words echo those spoken by Jeremiah to God at the outset of the prayer.”⁴⁹ Jeremiah had accused God of gulling him—“פְּתִיתָנִי”—and here his enemies plot on the basis that perhaps Jeremiah is gullible—“יִפְתָּה” (3 s. m. Pual fut.). He had also accused God of prevailing over him—“וְרוֹכַל”—and here the enemies hope to prevail themselves over Jeremiah—“וְנוֹכְלָה” (1 pl. m. Hophal fut.). Their form of the word includes a paragogic ה, and therefore may be emphatic. But the key takeaway is the reference back to v. 7. “This intratextual loop is also ironic in the extreme, and suggests a structural analogy with Jacob, who contended with God and man and prevailed (*vattūkāl*, Gen. 32:29). By contrast, Jeremiah struggled with God and men, but was prevailed over by both: a victim of heaven and earth. This is the deep anguish of his situation.”⁵⁰

The repetition of these words also provides insight into the deep frustration of Jeremiah's spirit: he is speaking with high emotion, and therefore designing too many synonyms for the sake of variety in his prayer is beyond his present ability.

A great turn comes about in the next verse, however. Such a turn is common in the complaint psalms, especially when the psalmist hears a response from God.⁵¹ In some such psalms, however, “the psalmist keeps praying but gets no response; in [Psalm 22] the psalmist eventually becomes certain God has heard him, but in Psalm 88 by the end of the psalm there is nothing but darkness. This is exactly the core of the distress in some of these psalms.”⁵² At 20:11-13, Jeremiah seems to feel God has heard him, perhaps being triggered by his own repetition of the word “כָּל”—“That word reminds him of the word the Lord had

⁴⁸ Igor Pohl Baumann, “Jerome's Reading of Jeremiah 20:7–18,” *Revisa Batista Pioneira* 6, no. 2 (Dezembro 2017): 313.

⁴⁹ Fishbane, “A Wretched Thing of Shame, A Mere Belly,” 177.

⁵⁰ Fishbane, “A Wretched Thing of Shame, A Mere Belly,” 177.

⁵¹ Cf. Ps. 6:8f: “Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD has heard my supplication; The LORD will receive my prayer.”

⁵² Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy*, 154.

spoken to him on the day of his call, when He had told the prophet that his enemies would fight against him and not overcome him”⁵³: “They will fight against you, But they shall not prevail [יִוֹכְלוּלָךְ] against you” (Jer. 1:19). Jeremiah’s comfort comes not from a new word of the Lord spoken specifically to his present circumstances, but from remembering the word spoken before. Therefore he offers this response of confession and praise:

But YHWH is with me as a great, mighty one; therefore those who pursue me will stumble and not prevail.

They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not have success; everlasting humiliation will not be forgotten.

And YHWH of armies, testing the righteous one, seeing the inward parts and the heart:

Let me see your revenge on them, for to you I have uncovered my case.

Sing to YHWH! Praise YHWH!

For he has snatched the life of the needy from the hand of the evil ones.

When stating that “YHWH is with me,” Jeremiah doesn’t use “עִמִּי” but “אִתִּי.”⁵⁴ The meaning is essentially the same, but the former more often includes shades of companionship or conjunction of action, whereas the latter is more typically limited to proximity. Jeremiah claims God being “with” him, therefore, not so much as an ally or champion, but as the Angel of God said to Joshua: “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come” (Josh. 5:14). In other words, God remains God, and Jeremiah his creature—but a creature confident of his God’s grace and deliverance, confident in victory, for God is a warrior: “a great, mighty one”—גִּבּוֹר עָרִיץ—the former adjective is a common word for greatness and strength; the latter could be translated “awe-inspiring” or “ruthless,” intensifying its companion adjective, which already puts its substantive far above average. This clause itself is the reminder of Jeremiah’s call, where God said that his enemies would not prevail against him “For I am with you [אִתְּךָ]” (Jer. 1:19).

In the darkness of his present circumstances, he knows the only safe place is “with” God. A bear cub pursued by poachers is safest when it returns to its mother, when its mother is with it. It’s there that “those

⁵³ Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 177.

⁵⁴ Making it more difficult (but not impossible) to use this as a Christmas text.

who pursue me will stumble [יִכָּשְׁלוּ—3 pl. m. Niphal fut.]⁵⁵ and not prevail [יִכָּלֹוּ—3 pl. m. Hophal fut.]⁵⁶.” With “not prevail,” Jeremiah emphasizes that the purposes of those who said they hoped to prevail against him would fail, precisely because of the presence of God with him.

And therefore they would experience shame (בִּשְׁוֹ) instead. They would not succeed (לֹא שָׁכִילֹוּ). But this wasn't only a failure of plans and the subsequent disappointment. Instead, they will suffer “everlasting humiliation”—“הַכְּלָמֹוּ” might be synonymous with “הַחֲרָפֹוּ” from v. 8, and therefore be a further intratextual looping in Jeremiah's poetry. But he says of his enemies' humiliation that it will be “everlasting” and will not be forgotten. Such an everlasting reputation is as though a new name has been written for these enemies, a shameful name which is demonstrated by the history as it plays out for them in the coming captivity of Babylon. Throughout Scripture, God's punishment of adversaries is of a piece with his deliverance of his people: “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Ps. 1:6); “For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Ex. 20:5–6).

Jeremiah turns to a petition in keeping with this plan. He addresses “הוֹהִי צְבָאוֹת” in his prayer—an abundantly common name for God, referring usually to his might and power as Creator and commander of all the hosts of creation both physical and spiritual. But he adds additional honorifics to God as well. 20:12 is virtually identical to 11:20, the only difference being in the titles and descriptors of God in the address. Here Jeremiah says, “בִּיָּהוֹן צְדִיק רֵאָה”—“testing the righteous one, seeing...”; but in 11:20 he describes the Lord as “שֹׁפֵט צְדָק בִּיָּהוֹן”—“Righteous judge, testing...” No great difference in meaning is present, but Jeremiah is evidently praying according to his custom, in a comfortable fashion.

With צְדִיק we might ask who this righteous one is. The adjective is a singular substantive, and while there is perhaps room to understand it in a collective sense (“the righteous [ones]”), the more natural reading is to limit it to one. And therefore the easiest assumption is that Jeremiah means himself; i.e., “YHWH of armies, because you test me and see I

⁵⁵ Note that the word is different from the synonym ([l;c, in the previous verse.

⁵⁶ Here, on the other hand, the same word is chosen as that in the previous verse.

am righteous....” Such a thought has parallel in some of David’s psalms: cf. “The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness” (Ps. 18:20).

The verb *בָּחַן* is also used with the metaphor of testing gold (Zech. 13:9), and further of testing persons (Jer. 6:27, 9:6, 12:3). Jeremiah, yet referring to himself as *יְדִיָּק*, could be here acknowledging God’s testing of the prophet through the work of Pashhur and other wicked opponents. In the almost identical passage of 11:20, the same verb *בָּחַן* is used, but with a slightly different context. There, God has told Jeremiah about a plot against his life, preparing him and saving him from the danger before it touches him. In Jeremiah’s prayer in response, he refers to *the Lord* as the righteous one who judges and tests minds and hearts, and on the basis of God’s character and work, he gives the petition for revenge. The testing of minds and hearts itself, in that verse, seems to be part of God’s work as Judge.

In 20:12, God is still Judge. It is in his capacity as such that Jeremiah can be justified in asking for *נִקְמָה*—revenge (cf. Deut. 32:35).⁵⁷ The Judge in any case in Jeremiah’s day would have to decide between two petitioners which was right and which was wrong. Solomon was praised for his wisdom in exacting justice (1 Kings 3:16–28), but even he had to perform an experiment to discover the truth. God is the Judge who sees “the inward parts and the heart.”

Jeremiah gives his petition, with a final argument in support: “Let me see your revenge on them, for to you I have uncovered my case.” He has offered his closing argument, so to speak, and is therefore confident of deliverance. Clement of Alexandria wrote:

For God does not hold out against his children when they beg his pity. And for you he will pray purely, held in high honor as an angel of God, and grieved not by you but for you. This is sincere repentance. “God is not mocked,” nor does he give heed to vain words. For he alone searches the innermost recesses of the heart, and hears those that are in the fire, and listens to those who supplicate in the whale’s belly and is near to all who believe, but far from the ungodly if they do not repent.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ “The Hebrew word [שִׁפְחָה] has a wider meaning than its English translation. In addition to judicial activity, the Hebrew word also implies defending, delivering, avenging, and punishing” (Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology & the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 227.)

⁵⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 41, quoted in Wenthe, ed., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 158.

Jeremiah has been brought low enough to experience and know the God of Mary, who would sing about six centuries later:

He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
 And exalted the lowly.
 He has filled the hungry with good things,
 And the rich He has sent away empty.
 He has helped His servant Israel,
 In remembrance of His mercy. (Luke 1:52–54)

In fact, the Magnificat might here reflect Jeremiah, who praises in such words as: “For he has snatched the life of the needy from the hand of the evil ones.” God’s deliverance in past-tense is considered here. Is Jeremiah looking back at his dark night now in light of the day? Is he considering his present freedom as an act of God, delivering him from death? Such a phrase would seem more suited to the situation in 11:20, when enemies were ready to kill Jeremiah but God warned him of their plot. But perhaps Jeremiah is thinking of just such occasions, or occasions in the more distant past when God snatched other needy ones like Joseph, Moses, and David from the hand of the evil ones. Either way, such a remembrance causes Jeremiah to cry out, “Sing to YHWH! Praise YHWH!”—third person imperatives: “שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה הַלְלוּ אֹתוֹ—”*יהוה*.” In the latter, הַלְלוּ אֹת־יְהוָה, we note that Jeremiah employs an extended form of the phrase that is often abbreviated to “הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה”—*Hallelujah!* There is no difference in meaning, and apparently the only difference in use is that the shorter form is more typical in liturgical contexts. Poetically speaking, such extension serves to slow and emphasize. There is deliberateness in Jeremiah’s phraseology. Considering also that he is the prophet during a time when mere lip-service was offered to YHWH, such an extension could also emphasize the name of the true God who is worthy of praise. At the same time, this verse is also a high point of praise in the prayer of Jeremiah.

The Old Testament lesson appointed by ILCW year A for Pentecost 5 ends here. We would prefer it to end here, ourselves. Wouldn’t it be better if Jeremiah, after feeling his feelings, realized how silly he was being and just grew stronger in faith and ended with praise to the Lord? What a nice bow to put on things. But there is more to come, and things will only grow darker. Because of this shift into deeper darkness, many scholars have hypothesized a sort of patchwork, Frankenstein-job on this prayer, or any number of other ideas to keep Jeremiah logically consistent. E.g., Holladay:

About verse 13, I confess I am baffled. It is a genuine word from Jeremiah; it has all the marks of his choice of vocabulary. Now it may be a quite sincere word uttered on another occasion but inserted here by a later editor as a fit conclusion to verse 12. Or, on the other hand, it may be in Jeremiah's mind a continuation of verse 12 on a note of affirmation in just the way that Psalm 22:24 follows directly on Psalm 22:20–21. Or again it might be ironic, hysterical, or sarcastic, considering the material which both precedes and follows it. There is no way I can see to decide the matter.⁵⁹

Perhaps misunderstanding the principle given by St. James, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:10), such commentary removes the humanity of Jeremiah, even denying that it can be sanctified and yet speak both lament and praise in close proximity. Even Keil resists it, suggesting that "we but think of the two parts of the lamentation as not following one another in the prophet's soul in such immediate succession as they do in the text" but rather "separated by an interval of time."⁶⁰

But both must be held together: "Lament keeps praise in contact with reality, and praise from the one who laments is the sign that, though suffering great hurt, this one has not given up confidence in God."⁶¹ In other words, Jeremiah might indeed be vacillating between extremes in emotions, and this need not be considered strange. Instead, in the middle of great complaints about the persecution of his enemies, he turns to the One he has been accusing of all this unfairness and softens, because he has faith in that One, and instead he buries his face in the loving bosom of his God, and there, in safety, can break down even further. What follows, in vv. 14–18, is Jeremiah finally being allowed to "ugly cry."⁶²

⁵⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah: Spokesman Out of Time*, 103.

⁶⁰ Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 198.

⁶¹ Fredrick C. Holmgren, "The Elusive Presence: Jeremiah 20:4-11," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 33; no. 5 (October 2006): 371.

⁶² This is not the opinion of Theo. Laetsch, who says of the transition from v. 13 to v. 14, "And the Lord, who was so close at his side a moment ago, seems now so far, so dreadfully far away!" (Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 178). Drawing on Luther and Cowles, Laetsch also suggests that Jeremiah is pitifully weak here, agreeing with Luther's practical theology and saying, "Any Christian that knows Satan's tactics in tempting God's children, knows from his own experience that Satan will not always cease the fight after he has once been beaten back, but that the inveterate foe may return immediately with still greater ferocity in order to attack the Christian rejoicing in his victory and less ready or altogether unprepared for such a second attack" (180). While I do not disagree with any of these principles, I believe that in the verses before us, a slightly different picture

The growl of “אָרוֹר” interrupts Jeremiah’s praise. The Qal pass. part. is frequently used as an exclamation, as Jeremiah uses it here. Because Jeremiah had just praised the Lord, and in that context had petitioned revenge upon his enemies, we might expect this curse to be an imprecation of the same enemies. However, there is a shock in what follows: Jeremiah curses “הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִלְדֵתִי בּוֹ”—“the day I was born in it” (Hebrew’s idiomatic way of aligning prepositional phrases with the relative pronoun “אֲשֶׁר”). The second strophe creates a chiasm with synonymous parallelism, putting the phrase headed by “יוֹם” first (as it was second in the previous strophe), and the verb phrase “אֶל־יְהוָה” “אֶל־יְהוָה” —“Let it not be blessed” second, parallel to אָרוֹר. בְּרוּךְ is therefore clearly made the antonym of אָרוֹר.

Job utters a similar curse on the day of his birth (3:3): “יֵאבֵד יוֹם” “יֵאבֵד יוֹם” —“Let perish the day I was born in it.” A debate could be had over whether “אָרוֹר” or “יֵאבֵד” contains greater harshness. In the broader context of Jer. 20 and Job 3, Jeremiah’s verbiage becomes more visceral and concrete, while Job remains abstract. But such a comparison is unnecessary and fruitless.⁶³ Jeremiah keeps company with Job and others who are in extreme misery, such as Dr. Gregory Schulz:

I have heard people explain that suffering is in effect the disintegration of one’s self, but I think it is better described as the feeling that things are not the way they ought to be *between persons*, particularly between human persons and the three-*personed* LORD God in view of God’s actions or inaction toward us.⁶⁴

As Jeremiah curses the day of his birth with increasing intensity, his self does seem to be disintegrating. St. Ambrose sees how “holy people have not without reason lamented their prolonged sojourning here: David lamented it, Jeremiah lamented it, Elijah lamented it. If we can believe wise people, even those in whom the divine Spirit spoke were

is available, namely that when Jeremiah begins the deepest form of his lament, God has in fact never been closer—although we do caution against any platitudes, agreeing with Holladay who says, “And whatever we do theologically with [such a] cry of dereliction, no glib answer will do” (*Jeremiah: Spokesman Out of Time*, 105).

⁶³ Personally, however, I find that whichever figure is the subject of my present study will be given preference by me, so I prefer to ascribe to Jeremiah the greater anguish at the moment. As soon as I begin studying Job, the score will be deuce until Job gains the advantage, and then it will swing back the other way. As Dogberry wisely puts it, “Comparisons are odorous” (Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* III.v.15).

⁶⁴ Schulz, “Pain, Suffering, Lament,” *LOGIA* 24; no. 2 (Eastertide 2015): 8. Emphasis original.

hastening to better things.”⁶⁵ We tend to be somewhat more comfortable with St. Paul’s version of this “lament”: “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). Our comfort in this regard is likely because Paul A) resolves to go on living and, at least here, does not wallow in his lament; and B) highlights the joyful work that his living on means!

Not so with Jeremiah. He growls once more, “אַרוֹר.” He moves beyond cursing the day of his birth to cursing “the man who delivered the news to my father.” “One might understand that Jrm would curse the day he was born (v 14). But then his leveling a curse against the man who had brought to Jrm’s father the news of the birth of the baby boy (v 15) is remarkable.”⁶⁶ For both iterations of the word “אַרוֹר” Holladay suggests,

It is possible ... to translate [“אַל־יְהִי בְרוּךְ”] here [v. 14] “How could it be blessed?” rather than “Let it not be blessed!” By this understanding Jrm is expressing dismay rather than anger toward Yahweh, emotion appropriate for laments.... And by this understanding, too...the translation [of “אַרוֹר”] is “cursed is...” rather than “cursed be...”⁶⁷

Holladay objects too much to the possibility that Jeremiah could be angry with the Lord. He attempts to twist around in this lament to obscure any possibility that Jeremiah’s plain meaning is what is intended, and instead (admittedly with pious intent) to present a more palatable option.

The grammar in these verses is much more straightforward than it was in the earlier verses of Jeremiah’s lament. The clear tone of the prophet who confidently pronounces, “בֵּה אָמַר יְהוָה,” seems to be back in force in these verses, except that he is not speaking *to* either the day or the man he curses, but rather to God *about* those objects.

An almost prophetic simile comes from Jeremiah’s mouth, as though he would take God’s Word for his own purposes to pronounce his curse: “And let that man be like the cities whom YHWH overthrew and did not pity.” The phrase “הָאִישׁ הַהוּא” is taken by Holladay to have a more obscure antecedent (namely, Jeremiah himself),⁶⁸ but again,

⁶⁵ Ambrose, *On His Brother Satyrus* 2.124-25, quoted in Wenthe, ed., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 159.

⁶⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1, 561.

⁶⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1, 561.

⁶⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1, 562.

the simplest reading is to have it refer to the same man of v. 15, the one who bore news of Jeremiah's birth to the father of the child. It's notable that Jeremiah did not curse his parents, in keeping with the Levitical law (Lev. 20:9; 24:10–16), instead “merely cursing the day of his birth” and “only the man who *brought the news* of his birth to his father.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, “It is an odd twist to Jeremiah's despair that he could wish a judgment on the man who brought news of his birth to his father like that which fell on Sodom and Gomorrah, *without pity*.”⁷⁰ Commentators universally assume Jeremiah is alluding to these particular cities, because of the verbiage of “עָרִים אֲשֶׁר־הִפָּדַ יְהוָה,” reflecting Gen. 19:25: “וַיַּהֲפֹדֵן אֶת־הָעָרִים.” The lack of pity also points to Sodom and Gomorrah, because after God had promised Abraham he would *not* destroy the cities if he found 10 righteous persons in them, he found only Lot and his family, and saved only three from the city, destroying the rest. But why should the poor news-bringer be given no pity?

First, let us acknowledge that this unnamed figure from Jeremiah's personal history is innocent of any specific sin. He does not deserve such curses, as far as we know. Instead, the reality of the curse exists entirely in the mind and emotions of Jeremiah himself. Consider his experience of (perhaps) mere minutes ago, having pronounced a curse upon the city he loves as figured in the man Pashhur. The city represented by a man is on his mind. But this city Jeremiah has cursed is a city he loves. Consider, too, how he would lament in years to come,

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
How like a widow is she,
Who was great among the nations!
The princess among the provinces
Has become a slave! (Lam. 1:1)

Could he escape witnessing the destruction of this city, Jeremiah certainly would take the chance. We can assume that Jeremiah shares the hope of Paul that “to depart and be with Christ ... is far better” (Phil. 1:23). Therefore he may be wishing he could be Lot, escaping from Sodom and Gomorrah, never to look back, into eternal life.

⁶⁹ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 464. Emphasis original.

⁷⁰ Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 464. Emphasis original.

As Jeremiah continues his curse of the messenger of his birth, he wishes that unfortunate man would “hear the outcry in the morning and noise in the time of midday”—

May he never be at peace! May he hear in the morning “the cry,” the anguished shrieks of terror uttered by the inhabitants of a city as in hopeless despair they see the victorious enemy scale the walls. May he hear the “shouting,” the triumphant war cry, the bellowing shouts of the bloodthirsty, lecherous soldiers as they go from house to house to plunder and rape and put to the sword whomsoever they find.⁷¹

The parallelism of Hebrew poetry would require this line to be connected to the one previous, so that the “outcry”—“זַעֲקָה”—and the “noise”—“תְּרוּעָה”—rightly refer to the alarms and cries of a city under siege. However, Sodom and Gomorrah suffered no siege when God overthrew them. There was no outcry or noise as fire and brimstone fell upon them from heaven. Jeremiah is instead imagining what is about to come upon his beloved Jerusalem.

As frequently occurs in poetry and in expressions of heightened emotion, the metaphor is layered and writhing, so that Jeremiah can express his complex thoughts in ways that actually fit into language: He is in anguish because he has suffered at the hands of enemies (Pashhur and others who despise him), and because as a result their city will be destroyed by God, but this is a city that he, Jeremiah himself, loves. He wishes he could have escaped this, and considers it would have been better for him simply to die and be transposed into the heavenly Jerusalem than to live as the herald of the earthly Jerusalem’s destruction. This wish takes the metaphorical object in the man who brought news of his birth to his father.

Although verse 16 ends with “צָהֳרַיִם”—“midday”—the sentence continues into a dependent clause with the beginning of v. 17 with “אֲשֶׁר”; this verse thus connected with the previous provides explanation to Jeremiah’s curse on the news-bringer. “Who” in this case bears the weight of “Because he.” The charge laid by Jeremiah in his curse-formula is that the man “לֹא-מִוֹתְתֵנִי מִרֶחֶם”—“did not kill me from the womb.” The verb “מִוֹתְתֵנִי” is a Polel, a less frequent form than the Hiphil for “kill,” but with no apparent change in meaning. In “מִרֶחֶם” the literal translation is provided as “from the womb,” but the question of timing may be asked: Did Jeremiah mean that he wished the man

⁷¹ Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, 178.

would have killed him moments after his birth, or before, while he was still *in* the womb? The prepositional particle מִן (from מִן) could indicate either of these: it is generally a preposition of separation (therefore its most basic meaning is “from”), but in the sphere of time (as here) it marks “the *terminus a quo*, the anterior limit of a continuous period,” and yet it “sometimes...loses its signif.” and can mean “in” instead of “from.”⁷² Because “womb” is often used as an indicator of time in connection with מִן, either of these senses is possible—however, it usually indicates a continuous period of time, and when מִן is connected to the synonym of רֶחֶם—“בֶּטֶן”—it indicates “*from* the time of birth until now.” But with a verb of killing, this cannot be the meaning, unless Jeremiah means an abridged form of a phrase like, “killed me at any point from my birth until now.” But given the subsequent clause, this is unlikely.

Jeremiah says, “לִי־וַתְּהִי אִמִּי קִבְרִי”—“and she would be for me, my mother, my tomb.” This is a striking and tragic image, with certainly many layers in the prophet’s mind. It’s a picture of a perversion of nature, insofar as motherhood is tied to life—as Eve (חַוָּה—“life”) is so named “כִּי הוּא הִיְתָה אִם חַי־כָּל” (Gen. 3:20). The mother therefore is meant to be a wellspring of life. But Jeremiah wishes his mother to be his resting place in death. Perhaps in this is a psychological desire for the comfort of his mother as well. As Jeremiah weeps into the bosom of his God, whom he cannot feel, his physical body may yearn for the place he would have wept as a child.

He extends the picture with the last half-line in the verse: “וְרַחֲמָהּ וְהָרְתָה עוֹלָם”—“and her womb be pregnant forever.” This line shares the verb with the previous clause: “וַתְּהִי,” and is therefore parallel with it: “mother” is “tomb”; and “womb” is “pregnant forever.” Implicit in Jeremiah’s use of the adjective “הָרְתָה,” I think, is his expectation of eternal life. This is still his version of St. Paul’s inner debate expressed in Philippians 1, i.e. “to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21) because of this expectation of eternal life. Namely, Jeremiah wishes he could have escaped this life of struggle and gone straight on to that life of peace. He says as much in the final verse of this chapter, which shares half a line with the previous verse:

“לָמָּה זֶה רָחֵם יִצְאָתִי”—“Why?” being a classic interjection in Psalms of complaint. Here it is followed by “זֶה” so that it more fully would be translated “Why this?” The sentence continues, of course, but

⁷² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Lafayette: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981), 1m.

with this extended interrogative Jeremiah's frustration/despair/anguish is indicated yet again. He explains what he means by "וְזֶה" with the phrase "I have come out from the womb." We have "וְרַחֲמֵי" again, as in v. 17, but here the מֶ is undoubtedly spatial. With the repetition of this word over these verses, Jeremiah's sense (albeit not his syntax) is nearly a zeugma: He was not killed from but came out from the womb. The infinitive construct "לְרִאוֹת" indicates purpose or result, therefore giving what came about when he came out from the womb and, ultimately, the climax of Jeremiah's complaint: "וַיִּגְוֹן וַיִּכְלוּ עִמָּל לְרִאוֹת עִמָּל וַיִּגְוֹן וַיִּכְלוּ"—"to see suffering and grief, and my days end in shame." Even though "וַיִּכְלוּ" is not infinitive, it may still be structurally parallel to "לְרִאוֹת." Alternatively, its clause could be independent and provide a suitable "end" to Jeremiah's prayer.

In any case, Jeremiah at this climax laments that he has been destined "to see" horrors. The verb does not mean only to witness as an objective observer, but also to "experience." Jeremiah likely means both senses, again, as he is thinking both of his own suffering and grief at the hands of Pashhur and other persecutors and of the suffering and grief that would come upon the city. But ultimately he is thinking of the effect upon himself with the final clause, "וַיִּכְלוּ בְּבִשְׁתַּיִמִּי"—Jeremiah can see no continuation from his present situation. The burden of the work is too great for him. Numerous others have seen a parallel to Elijah who, under the broom tree in the wilderness, "prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'" (1 Kings 19:4). His cry of "It is enough!" means, "It is too much!" This is certainly how Jeremiah feels. "He is not contemplating suicide, but he is affirming that his life has no value."⁷³

There is no response from the Lord to Jeremiah's complaint. But apparently God doesn't think the prophet needs one. The work continues, despite Jeremiah's apparent conviction that it would not be possible for it to do so. When chapter 21 opens, it is years later, under a different king, and Jeremiah is faithfully declaring God's powerful Word once again.

Conclusion

We have considered the opinions of several interpreters, commentators, and exegetes who believe that Jeremiah is sinning in one way or another in his complaint, or is far from God. Luther's answer ought to be sufficient: "Accordingly it is only speculative theologians who

⁷³ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 566.

condemn such impatience and recommend patience. If they get down to the realm of practice, they will be aware of this. Cases of this kind are exceedingly important. One should not dispute about them in a speculative way.”⁷⁴

Jeremiah has not lost his faith—it would even be saying too much to attribute weakness to his faith in this moment. He himself may *feel* weak, but in that weakness he is turning to his true strength. Although God gives no answer to Jeremiah’s pleading, the unsaid answer may be the same given to St. Paul: “I pleaded with the Lord three times that [the thorn in my side] might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor. 12:8–9).

Dr. Gregory Schulz, a true theologian of experience, has done great work in the area of lament, saying in one place that a purpose of the Psalms of lament is to “usher us into the deep grammar of lament.”⁷⁵ He says, “God shapes us via the psalms of lament—in other words, that the psalms simultaneously display God’s love for us and reshapes [sic] our loves.”⁷⁶ We are being trained by reading these Psalms in Scripture to turn to God the way these psalmists do. Jeremiah is among them.

One might object that the Psalms of lament are not intended for imitation or use in the community or in the individual lives of God’s people. Perhaps even more so one might make this objection to Jeremiah 20:7–18. But that is beside the point: no one needs to be trained to imitate the cry of “Why?”⁷⁷ when experiencing suffering. And because there is no response from God, one should beware putting words into God’s mouth, adding words where he has not spoken. We can read other portions of Scripture and see how he responds. He certainly does at times rebuke his prophets for their weakness of faith (cf. Jonah 4). And at other times he comforts them (cf. 1 Kings 19). With the previous laments of Jeremiah in his book, God did answer at multiple times with both sorts of responses (cf. the scolding tone of 12:5ff, and the comforting assurance of 15:11–12). We can understand that Jeremiah had been trained through these experiences to know what God’s answers would be. Now, when God gives no verbal answer to Jeremiah, he must remember how God has answered him in the past:

⁷⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Volume 54: Table Talk*, ed. and trans. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1967), 30–1.

⁷⁵ Schulz, “Pain, Suffering, Lament,” 11.

⁷⁶ Schulz, “Pain, Suffering, Lament,” 11.

⁷⁷ Or “the shout of No” (Schulz, “Pain, Suffering, Lament,” 8).

perhaps here even with a combination of rebuke and comfort. Holladay gives this suggestion for how to practically treat this lament:

What we can do is what the Israelite community did, and what is perhaps the most surprising thing of all. They did not say, “Mercy me,” and then censor this material out of the logbook. They said, “This, too, is part of the story; this, too, belongs in the testimony; this, too, we must teach to our children.” And since they did listen and learn and absorb these cries of Jeremiah, more timid folk since then who have leaned in the direction of such thoughts have been emboldened to speak out, since Jeremiah had blazed the trail.⁷⁸

There *is* use for such darkness. All people can learn to avoid the harmful side of that Stoicism which seeks escape from darkness by denying it. Further, since the experience of such darkness does not need to be trained speculatively, and many will go through it, especially those who suffer from depression and suicidal ideation, such experiences being shown in Scripture may—merely by their existence!—be a comfort. Other pastors have remarked on the effectiveness of reading the Psalms to the sheep in their flocks facing difficult situations. No platitudes, no glib responses, no “Yeah, but won’t heaven be nice?” Instead, a Psalm that expresses the deepest darkness of our thoughts can show that God will not reject us for experiencing the effects of sin in this world. Such a portion of God’s inspired Word is one way by which “the Spirit also helps in our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). This groaning of Jeremiah’s is able to be uttered (though at times it is so confusedly and imprecisely), making it one step above, perhaps, even deeper darkness that is possible in the human soul. But even for those deep places, out of the depths, God will hear your cries.

So this lament must be seen as a gift. For those in the pastoral ministry, when the Word seems fruitless, instead only bringing more animosity and mockery and indifference—or when entering into the misery and sin of others adds great weight, causing our Lord’s under-shepherds to become discouraged and despair, we may also cry out to the One who has the power to remove this suffering. We can weep in his bosom and express our experience of pain and know that

⁷⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah: Spokesman Out of Time*, 105.

the apparent failure is not, in fact, the end, and it should not in any case seem strange to the people of God. Isaiah 53 has set forth the classic portrait of the suffering servant; Jeremiah here embodies it, and Israel herself is soon to tread the same *Via Dolorosa*. All these foreshadow the sufferings of *the* Servant, whose death is the central, and literally the crucial, point of the whole biblical revelation.⁷⁹

This is not to say that, because Jesus died for you, you shouldn't feel sad. Quite the contrary. Because Jesus suffered such agony, he has sanctified *your* pain in him. There is therefore room to feel such deep darkness while *still* knowing the Law of God *and* his Gospel, and even firmly believing it. In such cases, perhaps this chapter *can* serve as an example, to voice the lament, even its scariest parts, and to leave them floating in the air with the offer of no solution, no fix. By the very act of crying out to God, speaking to Jesus, our priceless treasure, we are expressing faith. So do not fear, when comforting others, that they have lost their faith when they express such troubling emotions. And don't fear for yourself that your faith is lost in troublesome times, but turn to the object of that faith. There may indeed be fear all around, but find comfort in the wounds of Jesus, even if that means abiding in the pain of his wounds for a time. LSQ

⁷⁹ Wilcock, *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, 108.

Synod Convention Chapel Sermon on Revelation 21:1–4

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Text: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:1–4, ESV)*

MY DEAR FELLOW SHIPMATES IN THE ARK OF Christ Jesus, our risen and ascended Lord,
“The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down Of the big lake they call Gitche Gumee The lake it is said never gives up her dead When the skies of November turn gloomy...”

That so-called “Gichi-Gami” is Lake Superior. And when the skies of November turned gloomy on the tenth day of that month in the year of our Lord 1975, the ill-fated SS Edmund Fitzgerald bore Superior’s full rage.

In the midst of hurricane-force winds, shortly after 7:00 pm, that good ship and true sank into the frothing waters, along with all twenty-nine souls aboard—and the lake has yet to give up her dead. Its wreckage, now considered an official grave site, still rests in Superior’s

depths, about twenty-five miles north of a town—curiously enough—called Paradise, Michigan.

And so it's with these thoughts in mind that we consider these words from the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John: "And the sea was no more." (Rev. 21:1) This is God's Word.

Have you ever thought about that before? In the new heaven and new earth, when the holy City of God, the New Jerusalem, comes down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:2), *the sea will be no more*. But consider, dear Shipmates, that this is a promise of God's grace for you! The fact that "the sea [will be] no more" means that in the holy City of God, good fear will finally be restored to you.

Because "the sea" means fear—profane fear, dread, terror. You set out on the sea never knowing what's going to meet you there. "The sea" means turmoil—unpredictability, chaos. You set out thinking you're unsinkable. But ultimately, "the sea" means death.

Elsewhere in Scripture, "the sea" is home to the evil serpent, Leviathan, that no one can tame except the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth alone (Job 41; Is. 27:1; Amos 9:3). Elsewhere in Revelation, "the sea" is the home to one of the beasts called forth by Satan, which slithers out from it with blasphemies smeared on its heads, in order to persecute God's holy Church (Rev. 13:1). These are fearful images of "the sea."

God indeed made all things "very good" (Gen. 1:31) and made all of us fearfully and wonderfully, but in our sinful nature, we have only fearful fear. We have only profane fear of God that hides and blames. We have defiled fear of His creation—the violence and chaos at the heart of a corrupted cosmos; the violence and chaos of the human heart that is "deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9).

So, dear Shipmates, when the savage seas of our sick, deceitful hearts turn gloomy—when our soul is a damp, drizzly, gloomy November, a seasick sin-sick tempest—when our world is a storm-tossed sea of uncertainty and fear—

Do you still fear God—or are you just afraid? Do you flee to God for all comfort, power, and peace to calm the troubled waves—or do you flee to pleasure or distraction for comfort? Or flee to gossip or anger to give you some feeling of power over people and situations you don't particularly like?

In times of cross and trial, when Christ's love and peace can shine in us most brightly, would anyone see the reason for the hope that is in us

in Christ Jesus? Would anyone even think to ask us about it in the first place?

Or do we go from one sin to into another, one defiled fear to another? Instead of seeking the lifeboat of Christ's Word and Sacraments, do we merely change cabins on the Titanic? Or do you too, along with me, fail at godly fear and so often wind up sunk?

But dear Shipmates, if we ever have defiled fear that sinks us, Christ has conquered this sea of fear. He has walked all over it for you in His holy life, without sinking once. Dear Shipmates, Christ has saved *you* from this sea of fear, to fully restore to *you* the life-saving good fear of God!

For that is exactly what Christ did for you when He took all your profane and fearful fear upon Himself and put it to death in His own holy flesh on the cross. And the life He offered up for you on Calvary He lived in perfect reverence, in fearless fear. So by faith in Him there is nothing to be afraid of in the presence of the living, loving God who is not ashamed or afraid to dwell with you as *your* God.

Like the fearful prophet Jonah, the waves overwhelm us, the deep surrounds us, yet Christ has been swallowed in the depths of the heart of the earth in our place (Jonah 1–2; Matt. 12:38–41). Even in the midst of death and the grave, He finds you and rescues you. He restores your soul with nourishment from His own holy body and precious blood—just as He did yesterday evening at this very altar!

Like Simon Peter, we of little faith can only sink into the fearful sea, but Christ walks upon the waves for us (Matt. 14:22–33), reaching out to us through the waters of His Holy Baptism, where His blood “purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). In your own Baptism, Christ's hand takes hold of you and draws you so close to Himself that His own cross marks your head and heart as one redeemed by God, precious to Him.

By the saving faith in Christ created in those Word-soaked waters, you too with Christ have passed through the sea to be a fellow conqueror of death; you too are a fellow fisherman who has turned the Satanic Leviathan into a fish filet, and left his sea-serpent skull crushed in hell's garbage.

Because your loving Savior walks upon the sea for you. And when He does, He proclaims to all His disciples—and so proclaims to you here today: “Take heart! I AM. Fear no more” (Matt. 14:27). I AM, and My dwelling place is with you, and you are My people, and I will be

with you always (Rev. 21:3). Fear no more, for that sea of fear will be no more!

In Christ and by faith in Him, whatever the sea stands for will be no more in eternity, when by His own resurrection He raises you from death.

Fear—no more! Fear of losing what we love—no more! The dread of pain, and the pain of dread—no more! Uncertainty—no more! Doubt—no more! Chaos—no more! Christ is making all things new (Rev. 21:5), including you, and by faith He restores the holy fear of God to your soul.


All your pain, all your sorrow, the salt-sea of all your tears—no more! Lived by Christ, died in Christ, dried away by Christ's own hand in heaven. Any sorrow you experience or fear or imagine—no more!

Death—NO MORE!

The sea, it is said, never gives up her dead, but in Christ your death is no death at all, but your arrival at heaven's safe haven—Paradise!—where He will wipe away every tear from your eyes, and death shall be no more, and all your mourning, all your weeping, all your pain will be no more, “for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

For “there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1), and at Christ's return, the earth and sea alike will give up all their dead at Christ's command, and with Christ you too will welcome in the new heaven and the new earth at His return to you.

Take heart, and be of good cheer, even in the face of fear and suffering and death—for in Jesus, you have already conquered them all. You are fully restored to God.

Go forth and sail in joy and peace, dear Shipmates; your sins are forgiven! Amen. 

“Created for LIFE!”: LYA 2023 Sunday Sermon

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MAYBE WHAT I LOVE THE MOST ABOUT LYA [the Lutheran Youth Association] convention is learning about the different young people that we have in our synod. I love getting to know you all, learning about your different characteristics, quirks and everything that makes you unique. Now while I haven't had the opportunity to get to know all of you this weekend, I do want you all to get a chance to know something about me.

I wanted to share this morning that I am, by nature, a doubter. I have a natural tendency to doubt what God says in His Word. As a result, I've actually gone through three significant seasons of doubt in my life. I know that may sound like a strange thing for a pastor to say. Yet, I like sharing that, because during my first significant season of doubt, I felt like I was the only one. Being a pastor's son, too, I was like, "Ah, man, I can't be having this season of doubt." I like to share this to let you know that if you ever are in that season, you are definitely not the only one. There are people who would love to talk to you about it. Your pastors are there for you and would love to talk to you about it.

If you ever want to look me up and ask me about it too, go right ahead. I've learned so many things through these seasons of doubt. God has taught me so much about trusting Him and leaning into Him. He's taught me about how sometimes my questions were too small for the big answers He wanted to give me. I've learned so many wonderful things.

I share this partly as an encouragement, but also because the lesson that we have before us for our message today points us to some realities about our world, about life, about living, that, as they have sunk in for me, have helped so many of those questions over the years just fall right into place. These words point us to some truths that help us understand what it is that we're experiencing, what we were created to live for, and what God has restored for us to live in again with Him for eternity. We have a lesson today that shows us how we were "Created for LIFE!"

So let's dig into God's Word together. Our lesson today is 1 John 3:1-3:

See the kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. The world does not know us because it did not know Him. Dear friends, we are children of God now. But what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed, we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as Jesus is pure.

"See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God..." I want you to think for a minute about that beautiful relationship that God created to exist between a father and a child. I encourage you to think about the beautiful relationship specifically the way God created it to be. I specifically state this because, whenever we talk about this picture, I always recognize that there are some who have not had the best relationship with their father. If that's you, I'm sorry. That's hard. But please know that God designed that relationship to be beautiful. Know also that through Christ, you have that relationship with your heavenly Father.

So let's think about that, that design, that relationship, of a father who loves his child, delights in his child, and cares for his child. He protects his child and is there to provide everything that child needs. That's the relationship you were created to have with your Father. You could trust Him. You were able to know you were loved by Him. You could lean into Him and know He would provide for you throughout life.

That's the relationship you were created to have. You were created to have that kind of belonging. But notice something in these words we just read. It says, "See the kind of love the Father has given us, THAT we should be called the children of God." This means that it took love from God in order to make us His children. It's not just that He loves us as His children, but there's a love from the Father that turned us into

His children. There was something going on where we weren't His children. We were created to be children of God, but there was something going on where naturally we weren't actually the children of God.

So, if we weren't God's children naturally, whose children were we? Whose child is every person in the world? Scripture lays it out for us that naturally we are children of the enemy, children of the devil. This may seem a bit harsh to think about, to say, "I'm naturally a child of the devil." Nobody would like to say that. But let's just think through the story a bit. Think through the account of what took place back in the Garden.

We sang about this account in our sermon hymn, "The Tree of Life" and read about it in our first lesson today from Genesis. Think about how God created humanity with this incredible privilege to be created in His likeness, in His image. This doesn't mean that humanity physically looked like God. Although some of you, when you look in the mirror, maybe think that you probably look pretty close to how God looks. I'm sure none of you have that kind of conceit when you look in the mirror. Hopefully not. No, in Genesis God didn't have a physical body. Rather than physically looking like God we were created with the capacity to live in a way that reflected the character of God. We were created to live in a way that looked like God in the way that we love each other, interact with each other, and as it says there in Genesis, in the way we would take hold of God's creation and rule over it.

God would provide, as a good father, everything humanity needed to do just that. He provided the tree of life that Adam and Eve could eat from. God also said, "Eat from all these trees in the garden. I will provide this for you. There's just this one not to eat from." It was an opportunity for them to trust, to trust their Father.

But then the serpent, the enemy came there before them. Think about how he tempted Eve. He came and what did he say to her? "Did God really say that you're not to eat from any tree in the garden?" He came in and he got Eve to doubt or to question whether she could really trust her Father.

Then think about what Eve saw in the tree. She saw what looked good for food, pleasing to the eye, and also, desirable for gaining wisdom. Now let me ask you, which of those three things is bad? Is it bad to be good for food? No. Is it bad to be pleasing to the eye? No. Is wisdom a bad thing? No. God loves to give people wisdom.

Eve saw things that look good, but the problem was that this was not how God wanted to give them good food. They were to receive food

from their Father. Adam and Eve took it for themselves in their own way, rather than trusting their Father. When they stopped trusting their Father, immediately the result was that they ran from Him, they hid in shame and in guilt. They separated themselves from their Father and this world became broken.

Now think about yourself. How are you naturally inclined? Are you naturally inclined to act as a child of God who trusts your Father? Or, do you have a tendency to try to do things your own way? They may not necessarily be bad things, but do you reach out and grab the fruit your own way instead of trusting your Father to provide it for you?

This is what we all naturally do. We live in a world where this is what everyone naturally does. People are often seeking out and trying to do things that aren't inherently bad. People want to be loved. People want to have value. People want to have purpose. People want to enjoy life. Those things are great. Those are gifts from God. The problem is that people seek out and try to do it their own way.

So, we're all naturally in this state. We don't live as a child of the Father, but as a child of the devil, the enemy. But, "See the kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." See that our Father is the kind of Father who loves us so much that He says, "I don't want you to be, to be without me. I don't want you to be without life. I don't want you to be stuck in death. So I'm coming up with a plan."

God the Son took on human flesh, became the man Jesus to be everything that we were created to be but aren't. He trusted His Father every step, even to the point of dying on a cross. He commended His spirit into the hands of His Father. He lived the life we were meant to live, and then He died on the cross so He could take on Himself our sin. Like our second lesson said, "He who knew no sin became sin for us." Our sin died there with Him. Jesus rose again so that through faith in Him, we could become the righteousness of God.

When you were baptized into Christ, you became connected to Christ. You were baptized into His death. You were baptized into His resurrection. You are now clothed with Christ. You are a child of God. You have this relationship. You now get to trust in Him as your Father, knowing you are loved, provided for today and for eternity.

But now as a child of God, you have a discomfort in this world. You have a sense where now, because you belong to your Father, sometimes you feel like you don't belong in this world. Sometimes it's for a kind of shallow reason, where maybe you're around somebody who just has

a different opinion than you. For example, if you were to come visit me in Wisconsin wearing your Vikings clothes, you would feel slightly out of place. That would be a minor way of feeling out of place. But there's a deeper level of out of place that we feel as Christians. Our lesson today explains it.

Our lesson says that the world does not know us because it did not know Him. The world didn't get Jesus because Jesus didn't work like the world. Jesus trusted His Father. The world doesn't trust God our Father. Now if we are children of God through Jesus and now we get to trust our Father—if the world didn't know Him, is the world going to get us? Not so much. There's a discomfort we can sense that we just don't fit.

Sometimes there's even discomfort within us. This is because we still have that sinful nature. What we believe and what we know to be true doesn't always jive with something that we sense and feel. This is heightened by the fact that we live in this sinful broken world. That discomfort is hard. It can be really hard.

However, if you feel discomfort living in this world, the very thing that is so difficult, this discomfort, may actually be an indicator that you are right where you are meant to be—not in this world, but in Christ. If there is a sense that you don't fit with the way the world thinks, that's actually an indicator that you're right where you're meant to be. You are in Christ and a child of God.

Though we have this challenge today, of being uncomfortable in the world in this way, our lesson offers us some encouragement. Our lesson says “What we will be has not yet been revealed, but we do know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him.” We're looking forward to the day where we leave this world and we join Jesus in Paradise.

Not only that, but there will be a day when Jesus returns, when your body will be raised back, and you will have a body that's like Jesus's body. It's going to be your body. But think about how Jesus rose from the dead. He's still Him, but He's never going to die again. Apparently, He could walk through walls because He appeared to the disciples through locked doors. I don't know if we're going to do that or not. I'd like to think so. I think that would be fun.

More than that, however, we're going to have a body that is not full of pain or suffering or that will die. We're going to have a body that is much more like what we were intended to have in the beginning. We're going to be redeemed. We're going to be able to live the life we were created to live with God.

This encouragement is not just about us as individuals. There's something going on here in this lesson that points us to the reality that we get to be part of something and in something bigger. The final verse in our lesson says, "Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure." The more and more I've studied Scripture, the more and more I've come to love it. Part of what has been so amazing for me is realizing that there are some words that inherently bring a significant backstory with them. When you see these simple words, you can think about the backstory and then it makes that verse all the more significant. The word, "purifies," is one of these words. Think about where in Scripture and in what context we find the concept of purification. Maybe you think about the life of Jesus and the wedding at Cana. They had those big jars there with the water for purification, ceremonial washings and so on.

However, all of that with Jesus was rooted in the Old Testament. For the people of God to be able to be part of the community of God, they needed to be ritually pure. This is all especially hyper focused on the tabernacle and the temple which were all about proximity to the presence of God. In the center of that tabernacle, there were the Holy Place and Most Holy Place. There were specific people, the priests, who could be in those places. Even they had special rites they needed to go through to be there, because they needed to be pure in order to be in this pure place.

And what do you know... if you look at that Most Holy Place, the description we have is that it's adorned to look like the Garden of Eden. Actually, in a way, it was a kind of a reclaiming of the Garden, or at least it was a step in the direction of reclaiming the Garden. It was decorated with a variety of fruits. You have the candles that remind you of the Tree of Life. There you would have these priests who would go and work in the presence of God. The wording of their job description in the temple matches exactly the wording that was given to Adam and Eve in the garden. They were to work it and to keep it.

The Holy Place was a reminder of the Garden. It was a bit of a reclaiming of the Garden. It also pointed ahead. It pointed to the fact that there will be that day when Jesus returns, not just to raise our bodies from the dead, but to bring this broken world as we know to an end. At that point, as Revelation describes it, we will have the new heavens and the new earth, the new creation, where we will finally live life the way it was designed with our God. We're going to be part of that new creation, the life and world to come.

But now here's the thing in this lesson that is something we really need to chew on. It says, "Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure." That word "purifies" is in the present tense. If you are hoping for that day when Jesus returns, if you're looking forward to that new creation and being in that clean space, that pure space with the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit, and with all those in Christ, if you're looking forward to that day, then you are actually being purified now. You are a place where God dwells now,

I don't know about you, but that's sometimes hard for me to really embrace. Sometimes I don't feel like a place where God dwells. This weekend here at LYA convention we've been talking about some hard topics. I know I've not always handled them very well. Sometimes I haven't been a great contributor to helping move forward the cause of Christ. Sometimes I know that I've actually been a detriment because I just haven't said things quite right.

However, it goes beyond just not saying it quite right. I've come to realize that my biggest challenge to being a pastor is not prepping a sermon. It's not going to meetings. My biggest challenge to being a pastor is me. It's my sin, my struggle. Sometimes I look and I'm like, "Am I really qualified to tell other people this message, when I know how much is going on inside of me?"

So how, how could we be purified now? Well, notice where this lesson points us for hope. It says, "Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure." Jesus is the coming together of God and humanity. He's fully God and fully human. Isn't it brilliant? How does God restore His relationship with humanity? It's by becoming a human. It's Jesus who lived that life we were meant to live in order that He would redeem us and restore us. He laid down His life, paid for that debt, to redeem us and to restore us, to give us life. We were created for life, and He gives that to us.

We are baptized into Christ, united with the One who is God and human, who brings us back together with the Father. Because we're baptized into Christ, we're washed clean, and we're purified. Shortly we'll be participating in the Lord's Supper. When you take that supper, you are taking the body and blood of Christ, the One who is both man and God. You are taking God into yourself when you take the bread and the wine, the body and the blood.

Then, when you stand there with your brothers and sisters in Christ and you look from left to right, you will be standing there with the body of Christ. We're looking forward to that day of being with God and His

presence and new creation, but as we stand here today as people who are redeemed through faith in Christ, washed clean, united by the blood and body of Christ, we are the coming together of heaven and earth, of God and humanity. We are, today, filled with His Spirit, as we look forward to that day. We are, today, empowered to love people and, as 1 John speaks so much about, to love our brothers and sisters and share this good news.

We are equipped to do that, to love and to share. Are we going to do it fully? No, we are not yet what we will be. But today we can take hold of these truths that we were created to be children of God. No, we were not born naturally that way because of sin, but Jesus has restored us as children. We are uncomfortable in this world, but that's because, we have been recreated for a better world.

We will someday rise and be as Jesus is. As we hope in that new creation, we are purified just as He is pure. Take hold of that life and live. Live in this hope. Live as a new creation. Live for the new creation. Because you were created for LIFE! And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. LSQ

Book Review

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Book Review: Johann Ernst Gerhard (1621–1668): The Life and Work of a Seventeenth-Century Orientalist

Asaph Ben-Tov. *Johann Ernst Gerhard (1621–1668): The Life and Work of a Seventeenth-Century Orientalist*. Boston: Brill, 2021. 251pp. \$120.00. ISBN 978-90-04-046644-9.

When the name Gerhard is mentioned, it is usually assumed that it refers to the greatest of the seventeenth-century dogmaticians, Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), the arch-theologian of the Lutheran church. In this case, however, it refers to his eldest son, Johann Ernst Gerhard. The author's purpose is to study the life of J. Ernst Gerhard as orientalist, but he also considers his theological work, the most important of which

was the editing and publishing of his father many texts.

The author notes that historians in their productions tend to gravitate toward the exceptional figures in history but what is lacking is an understanding of the normal and average individuals living during a time period. This is one of the main reasons he chose J. Ernst Gerhard for this study of seventeenth-century orientalists. Still, Ben-Tov states, "As the following study hopes to demonstrate, Gerhard is also a salubrious reminder that the historically instructive 'normal' is by no means necessarily dull" (2).

J. Ernst Gerhard the Elder (1621–1668) was born and raised in Jena, Germany. His father died when he was only fifteen years old. One of his early teachers was Johann Michael Dilherr (1604–1669) who was a friend of his father and teacher at the University of Jena. Other important professors were Salomon Glassius (1593–1656),

who was his father's successor in the chair of theology at Jena and famous for his work on the Weimar Bible and his labors in hermeneutics; Johann Himmel (1581–1642), who together with Johann Gerhard and Johann Major (1564–1644) was part of the so-called Johannine Triad of Lutheran orthodoxy in Jena; and Johann Musaeus (1613–1681), who tended toward syncretism and synergism. The latter was the father-in-law of Johann Wilhelm Baier (1647–1695) whose *Compendium* in a modified form was used in the Synodical Conference (15). J. Ernst Gerhard studied at Jena until 1640 when he transferred to the University of Altdorf where he was able to progress in oriental languages. In 1646, he moved to the Wittenberg University to further his theological studies. While there, he was responsible for Hebrew at the lower faculty (17).

From his youth, J. Ernst Gerhard was destined to follow in his father's footsteps as a theological professor, but in his early years he was very interested in oriental languages, that is, the languages of the Middle East. Lutheranism brought about a revival in the use of the biblical languages. The oriental languages were useful in this study because they helped a scholar better understand Hebrew grammar and vocabulary. Also, the New Testament had been translated into languages such as Coptic and Syriac. These translations were beneficial in the textual study of the New Testament. In his twenties he had already mastered Hebrew, Chaldean (Aramaic), Syriac, Arabic, and Ge'ez (Ethiopian). He published his first

major work in 1647, the *Harmonia Linguarum Orientalium*. This was a polyglot grammar, taking as its basis Wilhelm Schickard's Hebrew grammar (1624), on which Gerhard greatly elaborated and added in separate columns parallel grammars for Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, and Ge'ez (72–82).

Along with the grammatical interests of his early years, he also had forays into several fields of oriental scholarship: an intensive study of the Hebrew Bible, the Syriac translation of the New Testament, occasional studies in the Quran, and several antiquarian pursuits. He was especially proficient in the Syriac used in the New Testament translations into that language.

The Ethiopian language was a particular fascination for J. Ernst Gerhard. It was a language which was just beginning to be researched in northern Europe. To analyze something new and delve into a new language may be the source of this fascination. However, one point that the author does not mention is that Duke Ernst the Pious (1601–75), his ruler, had an interest in Ethiopia. He brought an Ethiopian priest, Abba Gregorius, to Gotha to study his culture and planned a mission to Ethiopia.¹

As was the custom of the time, J. Ernst Gerhard made his scholarly academic pilgrimages (*peregrinatio academica*). In 1642, he traveled

¹ Timothy R. Schmeling, "Lutheranism in the Seventeenth Century," in *Five Centuries of Lutheranism*, ed. Aaron Moldenhauer (Fort Wayne: Luther Academy, 2020), 42.

north to the Baltic visiting Lüneburg, Hamburg, Lübeck, and Wismar. Here he came face to face with war-ravaged northern Germany as a result of the Thirty Years' War. One can easily forget that as many of the great Lutheran dogmaticians and hymnists wrote, a devastating war was raging around them (110–119). In early 1650, he set out on his grand tour of Holland (Leiden), France, Burgundy, Alsace (Stassburg), and Switzerland. On this tour, he planned to visit England but the stormy conditions in the English Channel made this impossible (119–137).

Returning from his grand tour, he was appointed a professor of history at Jena in 1652. He received his doctorate in theology the next year, and two years after that, in 1655, was appointed to the chair of theology. Thus, he became a theological professor at the Jena University, where his father before him and his son after him taught theology (138–154).

The same day that he received his doctorate, March 30, 1653, he married Katharina Elisabeth Plathner (1626–1671), originally from Langensalza. At the time of their marriage, she was the widow of Christoph Schelhammer, a professor of medicine. From this union were born two sons, Johann Friedrich and Johann Ernst Jr., and two daughters, Sophia Elisabeth and Maria Elisabeth, all of whom survived their father. Johann Ernst Jr. was the son who followed in his fathers' footsteps teaching theology at Jena (18–19). With this marriage, the Gerhard family home, *Zum güldenem Stern* which had been sold to Christoph

Schelhammer, a family friend, after the death of Johann Gerhard, was returned to J. Ernst Gerhard and the Gerhard family (5).

When the Gerhard house was sold to Schelhammer, the library of Johann Gerhard, the *Bibliotheca Gerbardina*, was moved to the Jena university library, but it remained a separate collection belonging to the Gerhard family. J. Ernst Gerhard continued to add to this collection throughout his life. With an assistant, he compiled a catalogue of the library, listing over six-thousand printing works (5). He freely allowed friends and students to use the collection. The *Bibliotheca Gerbardina* began to function somewhat as a research center (164). Later it became the property of the Ernestine princes and today is housed in the Gotha Research Library of the University of Erfurt (*Forschungsbibliothek Gotha*).²

In his years as professor of theology, he continued to publish his father's works. In fact, this task was a consuming priority for the rest of his life. For the sixteenth anniversary of his father's death (August 17, 1654), he produced a revised edition of his father's Genesis commentary and in 1657 he published the commentary of Deuteronomy. His most significant publication was a new edition of Johann Gerhard's *Loci Theologici*, a nine-volume exposition of Lutheran

² Johann Anselm Steiger, *Bibliotheca Gerbardina: Rekonstruktion der Gelehrten- und Leihbibliothek Gerhards (1582–1637) und seines Sohnes Johann Ernst Gerhard (1621–1688)*, *Doctrina et Pietas* 1.11.1–2 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 2002).

doctrine which was published between 1657 and 1664. The new edition was dedicated to Ernst the Pious of Saxe-Gotha (156–158). The publication of these works was a godsend for the orthodox Lutheran world at that time and is still a treasure for Lutherans today.

To the number of valuable works of his father that J. Ernst Gerhard published should be added his editorial work on Georg Dedeken's (1564–1628) *Thesaurus Conciliorum Decisionum*, a major collection of Lutheran casuistry, the purpose of which was to counsel the conscience of the Christian concerning moral issues and dilemmas that arose in the Christian life (158). J. Ernst Gerhard was the main editor of this project and when he died in 1668, this task fell to his two sons, Johann Friedrich and Johann Ernst Jr.³

Theological dissertations that J. Ernst Gerhard supervised as a professor of theology point to his interests, support for his students, and his expertise. There were dissertations on Armenians, Coptics, Maronites, Muscovites, Muslims, and many more. With all his responsibilities as a professor, he did not have time for many personal productions. However, his genius is to be recognized in the works of his students.

While at times it is said that Lutheran orthodoxy was not interested in mission work, this was not the case with J. Ernst Gerhard. His

printed correspondence indicates an interest in the Lutheran missionary Justinian von Weltz who was an Austrian baron. He was not alone in this interest. Johann Michael Dillherr, his former teacher, also expressed his support. J. Ernst Gerhard sent several of his Jena students to Weltz to be trained as missionaries for the New World. This mission work was centered in Surinam (Dutch Guiana) in South America (180–181).

Students of the history of oriental scholarship may be disappointed by J. Ernst Gerhard's neglect of oriental languages and the Syriac Bible after he became a professor at Jena. He did a considerable amount of work in New Testament Syriac in his early years. Both he and his friend Hiob Ludolf as young scholars had a great interest in the Ethiopian language. They both produced works in this area. However, in his later years, he did little in this area, while Ludolf became probably the greatest Ethiopian scholar of that time (94, 158, 216).

Was his academic life a failure, considering the dearth of linguistic studies in his final years? The author, Ben-Tov, would answer in the negative. One must consider his prestigious position at the university and all the responsibilities that it entailed. At the same time, he was laboring intensely to edit the many works of his father. While he produced no great works of his own during this period, one finds a series of academic treatises by his students which betray his hand and genius (158, 216). According to Ben-Tov, one should avoid the temptation of painting

³ Benjamin Mayes, *Counsel and Conscience: Lutheran Casuistry and Moral Reasoning After the Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 88.

his life as a quiet tragedy. There is nothing in his personal life or writing to indicate that he regretted the path that he had taken in life (206).

Confessional Lutherans emphatically agree with the conclusion of Bev-Tov above and are even more positive about J. Ernst Gerhard's life and work. The editing of his father's writings has had a major impact on the Lutheran church. Johann Gerhard's *Loci Theologici* is the greatest dogmatics produced in the Lutheran church, to say nothing of his other essential works such as *Meditationes Sacrae* and *Schola Pietatis*. Many of the writings of Gerhard are now being translated into English and are having a profound influence on the life of the church. Gerhard was the greatest of the dogmatists, the arch-theologian of the Lutheran church. It is said that Gerhard was third (Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhard) in the series of Lutheran theologians and after him there was no fourth. The Lutheran church owns

so much of this to the preservation work of J. Ernst Gerhard.

Asaph Ben-Tov has produced an excellent, readable history of the life and work of Johann Ernst Gerhard. He includes an appendix with a selection of letters to J. Ernst Gerhard from Hiob Ludolf and Johann Zechendorff, the Zwickau Arabic enthusiast, in the *Gerhardina* collection. The author wrote this book, as the title indicates, to give the history of this man as an orientalist, which he definitely succeeds in doing. A theologian would have liked to have found more on him as a theologian. In spite of this, the book is an excellent history in the English language, which is sorely needed. It is extremely beneficial for anyone interested in or studying seventeenth-century Lutheranism and Christianity of the period. The author is to be commended for this valuable book.

– Gaylin Schmeling

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